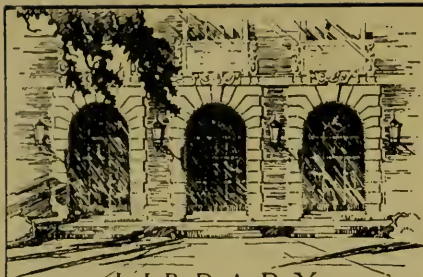


TOILERS
OF BABYLON

B. L. FARJEON





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TOILERS OF BABYLON.

TOILERS OF BABYLON

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "BLADE-O'-GRASS," "GRIF," "THE TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE,"
"IN A SILVER SEA," ETC.

For life the prologue is to death,
And love its sweetest flower ;
And death is as the spring of life,
And love its richest dower.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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WARD AND DOWNEY,

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TOILERS OF BABYLON.

CHAPTER I.

FROM the day of its formation the Wilberforce Club had prospered, and although it could never boast of more than sufficient funds to carry out its modest requirements, the principal of which were books and news papers, it had become in some sense a political power in the district. As was right, Mr. Bartholomew, to whom its existence was due, was elected its first president, a position which he filled for many years ; but although he was still in vigour of life, he had resolved to retire from the office, and in spite of all attempts to induce him to withdraw his

resignation, he insisted that it was time a new president should be appointed.

“You want new blood, my lads,” he said; “you might as well have a king over you as a president who reigns all the years of his life. A stirring up of the waters is good for the people. If the new man doesn’t work to your satisfaction I will take office again, perhaps. The vacation will rub the rust off me.”

It was, therefore, for the purpose of choosing another president that the Wilberforce Club mustered in full force. It was bruited about, and indeed known to some few, that there was a likelihood of the introduction of a personal matter at the meeting which might prove exciting and interesting. Mr. Bartholomew had found it no easy task to keep well in hand a strong and full-blooded team such as the members of this working man’s club. Boys with ideas, and with a fresher and more advanced kind of

education than their parents had received, had grown to be men, and were playing their part at the club meetings, and in the social gatherings; and to this younger element the prospect of a change in the direction of affairs was not unpalatable. Upon Mr. Bartholomew the necessity of keeping a tight hand upon these youthful members, whose ideas were apt to run ahead of the times, had frequently impressed itself.

There were two candidates for the presidency. One was Mr. Richard Chappel, who had taken part in the initiatory meeting at which the club was constituted. He was then somewhat of a timid orator, but he was an apt scholar, and was now fully competent to conduct working men's meetings. He was fairly popular, and had many supporters. The other candidate was Kingsley Manners, who was popular, and a favourite with all the members of the Wilberforce

Club. By some he was considered not strict or strong enough to lead, but a good proportion of those who entertained this notion had determined to support him. It was not of his own wish that he had come forward for the office. He had been proposed by a powerful section who believed that through him it could work its own ends. The backbone of this section were the young members, who were always ready to take a foremost part in any agitation—such as entertainments, in the heart of which lurked some political object; processions against, or in favour of some measure which was then being discussed in the House of Commons; the right of public meeting in public places, and so forth. These ambitious and hot-blooded members had been kept in moderate subjection by Mr. Bartholomew, and now rejoiced in the prospect of a president of less force of character.

Nansie's uncle, Mr. Loveday, was also a

member of the Wilberforce. He had joined it at Nansie's solicitation, who was in anxiety lest Kingsley, through his easy nature, should be prevailed upon to take part in some violent movement. Mr. Loveday's reports to her had removed this cause of alarm.

"Kingsley does no harm at the club," he said; "it is an amusement and a relaxation to him. He knows that he is liked by all the members, and the knowledge affords him pleasure; and he obtains there books and papers which occupy his mind, and which otherwise would be out of his reach."

Kingsley's candidature for the presidency had, however, seriously discomposed Mr. Loveday. He saw beneath the surface, and suspected that Kingsley was simply put forward to assist the views of others.

Mr. Bartholomew opened the proceedings.

"You know," he said, "what we are

met to decide. This is the last occasion—at least, for some time—upon which I shall take the chair at the gatherings of the Wilberforce; but that will not lessen my interest in its welfare, and I shall work quite as hard and earnestly as a soldier in the ranks as I have done in the position of your chief. Now, I want to give you a little bit of advice. Times are different from when this club was first started; men and opinions are more advanced; there is a better kind of education going on in the land, and people who, under the old ways, would never have learnt to read and write can now do both very well. But I want to warn you. It's a good thing to be able to read and write, but it's a better thing to be able to profit by these advantages. Go ahead we must; the onward march cannot be stopped, but beware of going ahead too fast. Slow and sure is a motto I was not very fond of when I was a young

man, but I have learnt its value since, especially in such movements as ours. There is no telling what changes the next fifty years may see; in my opinion they will be more startling than any that has gone before; but in order that these changes shall be for the real benefit of the people—that is to say, of us—it will be necessary to look before we leap. Now, I am not going to particularise; I am speaking in a general sense. There are individual instances of wrong with which I sympathise as much as any of you can do, but I don't intend to make any such instance a ground for general action. What we have to attend to is the interest and prosperity of ourselves as a body. According to the rules, you are now to elect a president for the year. You have done me the honour of re-electing me again and again for a number of years, and I believe I have given you satisfaction. I hope that our new president will work

as I have done — for the general good of all.”

Mr. Bartholomew having resumed his seat, a member rose to propose Mr. Richard Chappel as president. He was duly seconded, and then another member proposed Mr. Kingsley Manners, who was also seconded. There being no other candidates, the aspirants for office addressed the meeting

“I propose,” said Mr. Chappel, “to tread in the footsteps of our late worthy president, Mr. Bartholomew. I quite agree with him in all his opinions, and all he has done. More haste, less speed. We have never been in a hurry, and we have done a good deal since we started. In elections we have made ourselves a bit of a power, and the reason of this is that we have always seen where we were going to fix our nails; we have not knocked them wildly about, and made holes in wrong places. If you elect

me as your president, I will do the best I can in the office."

"Good," said Mr. Bartholomew.

"Good," also said and thought many of the elder members; but the younger ones looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Richard Chappel promises nothing," said one, starting up.

"What do you want him to promise?" asked Mr. Bartholomew; and as young Hot-blood could not exactly say, he sat down abashed, but in no wise satisfied.

"That is it," said Mr. Bartholomew; "and I should like you to bear it in mind. I don't wish to influence you, nor to say a word against Mr. Kingsley Manners, who is a favourite with all of us; but as a common member of the club I am entitled, as every other common member is, to express my opinion upon this subject. Here is a candidate for office, Mr. Richard Chappel,

who pledges himself, if elected, to govern the club in the same way that it has hitherto been governed; and here is one of our members jumping up and saying that he promises nothing. To that I reply that Richard Chappel promises a great deal. He promises to do everything that is constitutional; he promises to act for the benefit of the club, as I have acted. If that doesn't satisfy you, I don't know what will. Mind, I'm not saying one word against Mr. Manners; I respect and like him, but I shall give my vote to Richard Chappel."

"Let us hear Mr. Manners," said a member.

Kingsley rose and addressed the meeting. He had for some little while past regarded this approaching event as of great importance, and had prepared himself for it. He said he was in favour of public meeting in all public spaces. He spoke strongly

against the monopoly of brewers and distillers. He advocated universal suffrage, and he characterised as infamous the neglect of sanitary laws in the dwellings of the people. The whole aim of government, he said, should be for the benefit of the many, and not of the few. There were old-time privileges which, perhaps, could not be suddenly abolished, but to which, at all events, a limit should be set. He spoke for half an hour, and the tenor of his observations may be gathered from this brief description. When he sat down some were pleased, some were displeased, some did not know exactly what to think

“Mr. Manners,” said Mr. Bartholomew, “has generalised almost as much as Richard Chappel.”

“No,” cried some of Kingsley’s supporters; “there is a great difference between them.”

"Let us hear, and discuss," said Mr. Bartholomew, "it will open our minds."

"What does Richard Chappel say about universal suffrage?" asked a member.

Richard Chappel scratched his head. He had not given the subject that necessary consideration which enabled him to reply on the instant. Up jumped Mr. Bartholomew.

"I like that hesitation on Richard Chappel's part," he said. "Universal suffrage has bothered cleverer heads than any in this room."

"What do you say about it?" asked a bold member.

Mr. Bartholomew laughed.

"I would give it to every man who has a right to it."

"Every man has a right to it!"

"No, no; there must be qualifications. The Reform Act did a lot for us, and a lot has been done since, and a lot more will be

done in the future. There *must* be electoral qualification. Even in our little club here, every man has not a right to become a member. The difference between some of us is this—we agree upon the main point, but we do not agree in the way of bringing it about. ‘Go slow,’ is my motto.”

“Yes,” grumbled one, “and die before we reap.”

“Perhaps,” said Mr. Bartholomew, gravely. “But does that lessen the value of our work, which, I take it, lies greatly in its unselfishness? We look more to the future than to the present. We think of our children, and of the benefits they will enjoy, benefits brought about by us who may not live to see the fruit.”

Much discussion of a similar nature followed, and it seemed likely at one time that the result would be largely influenced by the

private wrongs of a member who had resolved to take this opportunity of ventilating his private wrongs, and had, indeed, been urged to that course by the more inflammatory spirits. His story was not an uncommon one, and may be narrated in a very few words. He was a working man, of course, with one child, a daughter whom he idolised. This daughter, to his grief and despair, had left her home, and it was, the father said, a gentleman who had brought the shame upon them. The man was very eloquent in his description of the monstrous wrong. He did not know the name or the whereabouts of the villain who had inflicted it, and said that if he could find him he would strike him dead at his feet. Mr. Bartholomew was too wise to prevent the father from speaking, although he strongly disapproved of the intrusion of this private matter into the club business ; but he saw that it had been pre-arranged, and

was intended to influence the election in favour of Kingsley. As a prudent general, therefore, he proposed the adjournment of the meeting, which broke up in some slight confusion.

CHAPTER II.

THIS meeting led to important results. It is by small and apparently trivial matters that the main issues of life are determined. A fall of rain, the plucking of a flower, the accidental turning to the right or the left—any one of these trifling incidents is sufficient to stamp the future with an indelible impress.

Parkinson was the name of the man whose daughter had been tempted from her home by the false wooing of a man in a superior station of life to her own; the daughter's name was Mary. The disclosure of this private wrong proved to be the most exciting incident in the proceedings

of the Wilberforce Club on the night of the proposed election, and after the meeting broke up the grievance formed the subject of animated discussion all around the neighbourhood. To feel and express sympathy for the father was humanly natural, but here and there this sympathy was expressed in an unreasoning and dangerous manner, and served as a peg — as was attempted at the Wilberforce — upon which to hang an ominous string of hardships as between class and class. Dr. Perriera, who had remained a firm and faithful friend to Nansie and her family, had just listened to certain outpourings of this nature mouthed by a trenchant demagogue to a small band of working men and lads, among whom, also, was Mr. Loveday. These two more intelligent of the audience walked away together.

“It is remarkable,” said Dr. Perriera, “to note the blindness of these ignorant orators

to palpable facts. The way in which Mary Parkinson was brought up was enough to ruin any girl. A father at work all day, and spending his nights at the Wilberforce Club. A mother, dying when her daughter was twelve years of age, and leaving as a legacy to her child a recollection of frivolities. This was one of the reasons—perhaps the principal one—why Parkinson spent nearly all his leisure time away from his home. His wife had no notion of domestic duties, was a bad cook, and either would not or could not make his home attractive to him. Parkinson is a good and skilful workman, has never been ill a week in his life, has never been out of employment. This is an unusual record; but it has not benefited him. When his wife was alive, she and he between them spent every penny of his earnings; she was fond of incongruous colour in her dress, fond of mock jewellery, fond of aping the foolish fashions of her betters. She was fond of worse things—of music-

halls and their brutalising vulgarity. I am well aware that it is absolutely necessary to provide amusement for the people ; without it life would be unendurable ; but I have always been of the opinion, and experience has confirmed it, that amusement in a worse form than that provided by the music-hall could scarcely be devised. I speak of the entertainments as a whole. There are portions of them which are innocently amusing and healthful, but the most popular features are those which the exponents of coarseness and vulgarity provide. I had some opportunity of studying Mrs. Parkinson's character, and I know that it was this coarser element of the entertainments that attracted her. I frequently heard her singing verses of songs which I regret to say were and are popular, and the true meaning of which is an offence to decency. The mischief is that this moral poison is at the bottom of the cup ; but it is well known to

be there by everybody who partakes of it; and even when it is so cleverly veiled that it can only be conveyed by a motion or a gesture, this form of expression is carried away by the audience and used by them when they sing the song in private. It is to Parkinson's credit that he preferred the Wilberforce Club to the music-hall; but it is not to his credit that he left the entire social education and recreation of his daughter to one so unfitted for these duties as his wife. I would not make life too serious, but I refuse to excuse any person who ignores its responsibility. Parkinson allowed his wife to take their little Mary to the music-halls and to implant in her nature a foundation of frivolity, which has borne bad fruit; it could not be hoped that it would bear good."

"I agree entirely with you," said Mr. Loveday, "and if I take the matter more closely to heart it is because of the affection

which our Hester bears for the poor girl. Mary is bright and attractive, and has many good qualities."

"Good qualities which needed home training," said Dr. Perriera, "and which should not have been allowed to run wild. Bright and attractive! Frequently a misfortune when the early education has been bad. I will finish my argument. The orator to whom we have just listened is one of an unreasoning class who takes into account only the faults and errors of one side of his case. That side, in his view, is thoroughly black; the other side is thoroughly white. Fair-minded men are bound to take into consideration both cause and effect, and men incapable of doing this are not fitted to lead. I am sorry that Mr. Bartholomew has resigned the presidency of the Wilberforce; in addition to being a man of sound advanced opinions, he was a restraining force. Do you think Kingsley Manners fit for the position?"

“I do not,” replied Mr. Loveday, firmly, “and I have done all I could to dissuade him from standing for office. At times I thought I was succeeding, but some kind of outside influence has always thwarted me. ‘A man must follow his star,’ he said, and he said it, I believe, with but a vague idea of his meaning.”

“There are members of the Wilberforce,” said Dr. Perriera, “who want to use Kingsley Manners as a tool, and he, with his amiable nature, might easily be led into a false position. His true friends must save him from this danger, if possible.”

“The difficulty is to find a way,” observed Mr. Loveday.

As he made this remark a hand was laid upon his arm, and turning, he saw Nansie. From her face the beauty of youth had not fled; sorrow and trial had left their traces there, but her brave spirit and cheerful endurance of long hours of toil had so chastened

her that no one could be long in her presence without being made to feel that here was one in whom the highest attributes of fortitude, faith, and duty's performance, were manifest. The time was within a few minutes to eleven, and Mr. Loveday was surprised to see her out at that hour of the night.

"Do you know where Kingsley is?" she asked.

"No," replied Mr. Loveday. "Is he not at home?"

"He has not returned yet," said Nansie, "and I am anxious about him."

"I will find him for you," said Mr. Loveday. "He will come home at once when he hears you are uneasy about him."

"Yes, I know he will do that. I should like to see him myself, to explain——"

"Nansie," cried Mr. Loveday, as she paused, "something is troubling you."

"Yes," she answered, frankly; "I cannot

tell you what it is—I do not think I ought.”

“Where is Hester?”

“At home, alone. She will not go to bed until her father returns.”

“But you, Nansie, are you not going back?”

“No; I have something to do that will keep me out late. That is what I wished to see Kingsley for—to explain it to him. Tell him I may not be home till the morning, and that Hester is waiting for him. He is not to worry himself; everything is right.”

“There goes a true woman,” said Dr. Perriera, looking after her, “upon an errand of mercy and goodness.”

“Do you know what it is?” asked Mr. Loveday.

“No, nor can I guess, but I would stake my life that it is as I say, and that you

believe as I do, notwithstanding that we are both in the dark."

'You are right," said Mr. Loveday. "Dr. Perriera, misfortune sometimes proves a blessing. It has been so to me. Had I been rich and prosperous, I doubt whether it would have been given to me to know the perfect sweetness and beauty to be found in common lives."

"It is the fashion to call them common lives," responded Dr. Perriera, "though here and there is a life which an angel would be proud to live."

CHAPTER III.

SOME three months after this night a gentleman was sitting with a friend in a well-appointed house in Harley Street. The host was a man in the prime of life, his name Hollingworth; the guest was his elder in years, his name Manners—none other than the once great contractor—Mr. Valentine Manners, Kingsley's father. They had dined, and were sitting over their claret.

Mr. Valentine Manners had long since retired from business. For many years he had travelled the world in search of something—he knew not what—which he had lost, and had returned home without finding it. Part of the time his nephew, Mark Inglefield, who

was to be his heir, had travelled with him ; but the younger man had made periodical visits to England upon his uncle's private affairs, of which he had the practical management. A fortune so vast as Mr. Valentine Manners had amassed was in itself a business, the care of which occupied a great deal of time.

Mr. Hollingworth and his guest had discussed many matters, the most important of which was a proposed marriage between Mr. Hollingworth's only daughter, Beatrice, and Mark Inglefield, the rich contractor's heir. The girl was barely twenty, Mark Inglefield nearly fifty ; but these disparities are not uncommon in matrimonial unions in which money and not love is the principal factor. Mr. Hollingworth had only one other child, a son of twenty-six, who had just been elected a member of the House of Commons. The conversation of the two gentlemen was interrupted by the announce-

ment of a servant that a man wished to see Mr. Hollingworth.

The tone of the servant when he uttered the words "a man" was a sufficient indication of his opinion of the visitor's standing. Mr. Hollingworth accepted his servant's opinion.

"Did you say I was busy?"

"I told him so, sir, and that you could not be disturbed."

"Well?"

"He said he must see you, sir, and that he would come every day and night till he did."

Mr. Hollingworth groaned.

"Did he give you his name?"

"Yes, sir, and said you would know it. Mr. Parkinson—a stone-mason, he said he was."

"Parkinson—Parkinson! I do not know the man, and I have not been engaged

in building. More in your way, Mr. Manners."

His guest nodded, but made no remark; there was nothing in the incident to interest him.

"He has been here several times this week, sir," said the servant.

"I remember now hearing of it, and I left instructions that he was to put his business with me in writing."

"He paid no attention to that, sir, but kept on calling."

"Well, we must get rid of him somehow. A stone-mason, eh? Parkinson—the very name for a stone-mason. My boy Dick carried his election on the working man's interests. A popular cry; we are becoming very Radical. Show Mr. Parkinson up. You have no objection, Mr. Manners?"

"None at all."

The servant retired, and returned, ushering

in Mr. Parkinson. Mr. Hollingworth cast a keen glance at his visitor, and saw that he was to all appearance a respectable working man.

“You wish to see me?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Mr. Parkinson in a respectful tone, and yet with something of defiance. He had repaid Mr. Hollingworth’s keen glance with interest. He was calmer now than when he had recounted his wrongs at the meeting of the Wilberforce Club; but although he was holding himself in check, he was quite as much in earnest.

“It seems that a personal interview was imperative.”

“It was, sir.”

“Well, I am not disinclined to listen to you. Anything respecting politics? My son, Mr. Richard Hollingworth, has lately been returned to Parliament in the interests of the working man, as I dare say you know.”

“Yes, sir, I know it. That is how I

found you out, though I expected to see an older gentleman than you."

Mr. Hollingworth smiled. "You may do that in the course of years if I live. Your expectation is an inexplicable one, however, and as strange as your expression that you have found me out. Almost a crime," he continued, still with a smile on his face, "to be found out in these days. You have come, then, upon political business?"

"No, sir; I have come upon private business."

"Upon private business! A singular time to introduce it. As singular as the question. What private business can there be between you and me, who are perfect strangers to each other?"

"There *is* private business between us, sir, of a vital nature. You will understand if you will listen to me, as you said you would."

"Will you be long?"

“I will try not to be, but there’s a tale to tell.”

“Tell it, my friend, as briefly as you can. Will you wait?” he asked, turning to his guest, “or shall we resume our conversation to-morrow?”

“I will wait,” replied Mr. Manners, “unless you wish to hear this person in private.”

“I have no such wish.”

“I think it will be better, sir,” said Mr. Parkinson, “that we shall speak without witnesses.”

“Let me be the judge of that,” said Mr. Hollingworth, warmly. “You have chosen to intrude upon me at an untimely hour, and if you have anything to say of which you are ashamed, you have only yourself to blame for the publicity.”

“The shame’s on your side, not on mine,” retorted Mr. Parkinson, speaking as warmly

as Mr. Hollingworth had done, "and the blame rests with you and yours."

Mr. Hollingworth's hand, at this retort, was extended towards the bell, and but for the last two words uttered by his visitor he would have ordered him to the door. He sank back in his chair, and with some sternness desired Mr. Parkinson to proceed.

"I am, as you may see, sir, a working man, and have been so all my life. I live Whitechapel way, and this is my full name and address." He placed an envelope on the table. "I am a widower with one child, a daughter, just eighteen years of age. My wife died eight years ago, and I brought up my girl as well as I could. She is good-looking, worse luck! and can read and write. There has never been anything against me; I owe no man a penny, and my character in my line is as good as yours or any gentleman's in his."

"I don't see how all this affects me," said Mr. Hollingworth, with an assumption of weariness. "Cannot you spare me further details?"

"I must tell my story my own way, sir, and you will soon see how it affects you."

"Go on, then, if it must be so."

"If we had been let alone, my girl and me, there would have been no occasion for me to be here now; but we were not let alone, to live our lives our own way. We were interfered with by a gentleman."

"Come, come, my friend," said Mr. Hollingworth, "this is a mere clap-trap."

"Not a bit of clap-trap about it, sir. Hard, bitter truth; that's what it is. According to the order of things, my girl would have married one of my sort, one of her own—there were plenty after her, but she wouldn't look at 'em—and would have

had her regular ups and downs, and gone through life respectable."

"Oh," remarked Mr. Hollingworth, flip pantly, "she has spoilt her chance of that!"

"It's been spoilt for her, sir. When and where she met this gentleman of hers I've no means of saying; she's as close as wax; and it is only by a trick—a just trick that a father has a right to use—that I've come to some knowledge of things. But I'll tell my story straight, and won't run ahead more than I can help. It's months ago now since my girl run away from me, and left never a word behind her that I could find her by."

"In the name of all that's reasonable," exclaimed Mr. Hollingworth, "you have not come to me to find her for you?"

"No, sir; that's not my business here. My girl was found and saved by an angel."

“A veritable angel?” asked Mr. Hollingworth. He was nettled by the tone and attitude of the man, and was disposed to resent these signs by a lightness of manner in his reception of the uninvited confidence that was being reposed in him.

“What do you mean by veritable?” demanded Mr. Parkinson; and quickly himself answered his own question. “Oh! I know; a kind of mockery of me! The angel I mean is a woman with a name which I’ll give you if you like.”

“It’s a matter of perfect indifference to me, my good man.”

“I’ll give it you, then. There are not many like her, and as I come here alone, unsupported by evidences or witnesses, you might, when I’ve done, like to find out for yourself whether I’m speaking the truth. That would be only fair. The good angel who found and saved my Mary is Mrs. Manners, who is something more than loved—

she's worshipped by every one who knows her."

When Mr. Parkinson uttered the name of Manners, Mr. Hollingworth started, and glanced at his visitor; but the great contractor made no movement.

"Your daughter being found and saved," said Mr. Hollingworth, "there is a pleasant ending of your story."

"Not at all, sir. There's been a wrong done that must be righted; and before we come to the way of that, there's more to say. When my girl ran away from her home I was for a long time fairly mad, and was ready to strike both him and her dead at my feet if I had the chance. I was as bitter against her as against him; and if I'd known what I know now, there would have been a case in the papers, and the boys in the streets screaming out the news. But I couldn't discover who the man was; all that reached me was through hearsay from one of her girl

companions, who had happened to see her in the company of a man they called a gentleman. They didn't know who he was any more than I did ; and when I made up my mind that my girl had been brought to shame, I swore that she should never darken my doors again. A good many weeks passed by, and my feelings against my girl got harder instead of softer ; and then, sir, the usual thing happened."

"I understand," said Mr. Hollingworth, "as little of what you mean by 'the usual thing happened,' as I do of how the story you are telling can possibly affect me."

"A little more patience, sir, and it will be clear to you. The usual thing is, that the man who wronged my child deserted her."

"Ah !"

"She was left pretty well shipwrecked in this big city of cruelty. Where should she turn to ? Where do they all turn to in their

thoughts? To the home they have brought disgrace upon ; to the father and mother whose hearts they have broken. But my girl was afraid to come to me. She had somehow heard that I had sworn she should never cross my threshold again ; that I had sworn to strike her down dead if she ever came before me again. So she hid herself and her shame, and fell into a fever, and was close to the death I had sworn against her. I knew nothing of it ; the news didn't reach my ears, but it reached the ears of the angel woman I spoke of, Mrs. Manners. The way of it was that, thinking she hadn't many hours to live, my girl wrote a letter to one whom she loved and honoured, a girl of her own age, sweet, and loving, and good, Miss Hester Manners. ' Dear Hester,' my girl wrote, ' come to me, if only for a minute, and give me one kind look before I die. Heaven will reward you for it.' There was more in the letter that I won't trouble you

with. Miss Hester, as was right and proper, showed her mother the letter, and her mother, as was right and proper, said, 'My dear, *I* will go and see the poor girl.' Heaven bless her for her merciful act all the days of her life ! She is poorer than I am by a long way, and has had such a battle to fight as few women have, and has fought it in a way that no other woman could. I have been pretty much of a careless, selfish man, I can see that now ; not through her telling me of it ; no, sir ; but through her ways, somehow, that I've seen so much of lately. I've been neglectful of my duty, though I've led an honest life, which is about the best that can be said about me, but I'm a different man now through her, a different and a better man, I hope, than I've ever been ; and if I could serve her by suffering any pain that a man can suffer, I'd do it gladly, and thank the chance. It was late at night when Miss

Hester gave her the letter from my poor girl, and her husband wasn't at home, but she went straight on her errand of mercy, and remained with my child, nursing and attending to her till daylight came ; and when she went away she promised to go again, and she did, day after day, night after night, taking her sewing with her, for the minutes were precious, and bread for her family had to be earnt. This went on, sir, for some time in secret without me ever knowing it, until my Mary was snatched from death's door by this bright angel. Then, sir, Mrs. Manners began to speak to me of my child ; how she did it I can't remember, try my hardest ; there was nothing sudden, no news all at once that my Mary had been almost dying, and nursed back to life by her ; she softened my heart gradually in a cunning and beautiful way, bringing Miss Hester with her to my rooms, and making me feel, as the dear young lady moved about, doing this and that

for me, how happy I might be once more if I could see my child doing as she was doing. Mrs. Manners' heart is not only a heart of love and mercy, it is a heart of wisdom, and when she had well prepared me, and had led up to it so that I couldn't have refused to do the hardest task she set me, then, sir, it was that she told me all that had happened to my Mary, and told me, in her loving, gentle voice, that it was my duty to open my arms to the child who had been led into wrong through her own innocence and helplessness, and perhaps through my own neglect. She didn't put this last thought into my mind; it came there out of my own sorrow and self-reproach, but it was Mrs. Manners who planted the seed. I took my girl home, hoping and believing that everything would be right, and resolved, too, to do all I could to make 'em right. But the contrary has happened, and another disgrace, that none of us but my Mary knew, is

threatening me now. The companions she used to associate with won't have anything to say to her. The poor can be hard, sir, as well as the rich—I've found that out ; can be hard, and unjust, and merciless. Perhaps it was my Mary's own fault. She went away a merry, chattering magpie, singing, and laughing, and chirruping like a cricket. She came back quiet and melancholy, and she moves about as though she wanted to die. The only woman friends she has are Miss Hester and her mother ; she's faithful and loving to them, but often when they are gone I find her crying to herself fit to break her heart. Now, sir, as was natural, I tried to get out of her the name of the man who has brought this ruin and shame upon us, but never a word would she let slip, even to them who proved themselves better friends to her than I was. Seeing she was so quiet and shy, I looked out for letters ; none came, and if she wrote any she has kept it secret from me. Now,

sir, with the new disgrace threatening us that only a few days ago came to my knowledge, I was more determined than ever to find out the man who must do her justice. I had never pried into the little box of clothes she brought home with her, and that she kept always locked in her bedroom, but I thought myself justified now in opening it unknown to her. It wasn't difficult; it is a cheap, common box, and almost any key the size of the lock would open it. I found no letters there, but a portrait, with a name at the back in my girl's writing. I went to her straight, and told her what I had done. 'Is this the man?' I asked her. She said, 'Yes,' in a whisper. 'Did he give it to you himself?' I asked. 'No,' she answered, 'I took it without his knowing, and he doesn't know now that I've got it.' That shows the wickedness and artfulness of the villain—I beg your pardon, sir, for letting the right word slip."

“Why beg my pardon?” asked Mr. Hollingworth, coldly.

“Can’t you guess what I’m coming to, sir?”

“Indeed I cannot; and I may add that up to this point, although I sympathise with you in your trouble, and wish it were in my power to relieve you, I have not the remotest idea why you have inflicted your story upon me.”

“Is that true?”

“As this is the last time you will have the opportunity of speaking to me, I forgive the impertinence. It is quite true.”

“But you sympathise with me, you say?”

“I have said so. You are yourself aware that your unhappy story is one which many poor fathers can relate; but that does not render it less detestable. You seem to be mistaken in me, my friend. You present yourself here to me, and plainly, although

not in the exact words, you say, ‘I am a working man, and therefore an honest man. You are a gentleman, and therefore a scoundrel. I credit myself with virtue ; I credit you with vice. I am a worthy member of society ; you are an infamous one.’” And now Mr. Hollingworth spoke with real dignity : “You are absolutely and fatally in error. The pernicious views you have in effect expressed are, I am well aware, shared by many of your class. They are erroneous views. Among the class I may be supposed to represent are a number of very worthy and honest persons who are really earnest in their desire and endeavours to set right what is wrong in society. I believe myself to be one of these persons ; I believe my son to be another ; and it is you and such as you who throw obstacles in our way. There is something too much of this parade of exceptional virtues on the part of such demagogues as

yourself. Have I made myself clear to you ?”

“Quite clear, sir,” replied Mr. Parkinson, frankly and respectfully. He had listened with eager attention and interest to Mr. Hollingworth, from whose speech he seemed to derive satisfaction. “And I am free to admit that there is some truth in what you have said.”

“Really !” exclaimed Mr. Hollingworth, letting his earnest mood slip from him. “Perhaps you are as free to admit that even among the humbler classes such wrongs are done as you have come here to descant upon.”

“I admit it, sir ; but each wrong must be treated on its own special ground. Had a poor man betrayed my child, I should have gone to him as I now come to you.”

“This is beyond endurance——”

“No, sir,” interposed Mr. Parkinson, “do

not summon your servants until you hear what name is written on the back of the portrait I found in my poor girl's box."

"Let me hear it, then, without any further beating about the bush."

"It is that of your son, Mr. Richard Hollingworth !"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HOLLINGWORTH fell back in his chair, shocked and horrified, and a panorama of years of deceit crossed his mind. If what this man said was true, he had undoubted justice on his side. If what this man said was true, the son in whose honour and rectitude the father had implicitly believed, had lived a life of treachery, had secretly lived the infamous life, and had successfully concealed the knowledge from those who held him dear.

“When I read the name on the picture,” said Mr. Parkinson, “it did not enlighten me, and as my daughter, after her first admission, obstinately refused to give me

further particulars of her betrayer, I should have remained in the dark but for one circumstance. I belong to a working man's club, the Wilberforce, which is in some sense a political club, as all such clubs are more or less. For weeks before my discovery of the portrait, I had not visited the club, having no heart to mix in its affairs; but it happened that I strolled into the club-room on the night the portrait fell into my hands. Political matters are freely discussed there, and the effect of every fresh election is commented upon. The evening papers contained the result of the election which has made your son a Member of Parliament, and then it was that I saw his name in print. I took counsel with certain friends upon whose judgment I can rely, and their advice was that I should come direct to you. I have done so, and you will now know whether I was justified in seeking this interview."

He paused, and it was only after a long silence that Mr. Hollingworth said :

“Quite justified.” Mr. Parkinson bent his head and waited. When Mr. Hollingworth spoke again it was in a constrained voice. “I should have preferred that your disclosure should have been made to me privately.”

“I wished it, sir,” interrupted Mr. Parkinson.

“Yes ; I forgot. The fault was mine.” He looked at Mr. Manners, but the contractor’s eyes were averted. Not by word or motion had he denoted that he had been an interested listener to what had passed. “Nothing can be decided in the absence of my son, and you must not suppose that I shall condemn him unheard. What reparation can be made——” He could not finish the sentence ; his agitation was so great that he scarcely knew what he was saying.

“You would not think of offering us

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money," said Mr. Parkinson, in a tone of deep sternness.

"No, no, of course not. And yet—but I can say no more at present. Have you the portrait with you?"

"Yes, I brought it, expecting you to ask to see it."

He handed it to Mr. Hollingworth, who, the moment he saw it, gave utterance to a cry of joyful surprise. It was the cry of a man who had been suddenly and unexpectedly released from unendurable torture.

"You are not mistaken?" he exclaimed. "This is the picture you found in your daughter's box?"

"It is," replied Mr. Parkinson, gazing suspiciously at Mr. Hollingworth. "Your son's name is written on the back."

"I see it, in your daughter's handwriting." Mr. Parkinson could not understand the meaning of another strange expression in

Mr. Hollingworth's face as that gentleman raised his eyes from the picture and partly turned to the contractor. "You are satisfied that this is the portrait of the—the gentleman who has wronged your daughter?"

"She told me it was, and I am satisfied."

"You lift a weight from my heart. Mr. Parkinson, this is not the portrait of my son, nor of any member of my family."

"I'll not take your word for it," cried Mr. Parkinson, taking, with some roughness, the picture from Mr. Hollingworth. "Tell me, sir, you," he said, addressing Mr. Manners, "whether he speaks the truth."

Before Mr. Hollingworth could prevent him he thrust the picture into Mr. Manners' hand, who, gazing upon it, recognised the likeness of his nephew, Mark Inglefield. Mr. Manners and Mr. Hollingworth exchanged meaning glances.

"My friend speaks truly," said Mr. Manners, "and you might have believed him

without appealing to me. This is not his son."

"What infamous plot is here?" cried Mr. Parkinson.

"None of our making, Mr. Parkinson," said Mr. Hollingworth. "With all my heart I sympathise with you."

"I want none of your sympathy," said Mr. Parkinson, "I want justice, and I will have it. Whoever this man is, I will drag him into the light." In his passion he turned from one to the other with furious looks.

"You cannot blame the innocent," said Mr. Hollingworth, pointing to a picture on the wall. "That is my son, Mr. Parkinson. You can trace no resemblance between the portraits."

"No, they are not the same men. What is the meaning of this mystery? It shall not remain a mystery long—I swear it!"

"Is there any reason why this interview should be prolonged?" said Mr. Hollingworth.

“If you doubt my word, and that of my friend, you can set your doubt at rest by looking at the illustrated papers this week, in which the portrait of my son, a newly-elected Member of Parliament, will appear. It would be the height of folly on my part to attempt to deceive you. I make this promise to you, Mr. Parkinson. If you prove the portrait to be that of my son—who is as dear to me as your daughter is to you—and if he has done your child wrong, he shall make her the only reparation in the power of an honourable man.”

“I hold you to your word, sir,” said Mr. Parkinson, “and if I have been mistaken, I ask your pardon. There is, however, something more for me to say. I am not blind; I have watched the faces of you gentlemen, and I believe you know who this person is. I may be mistaken in this belief, as I am in the other, according to you. Will you tell me if I am right or wrong?”

Mr. Hollingworth made a deprecatory motion with his hand which the injured father construed into a refusal. Mr. Manners was motionless.

“Very well, gentlemen,” said Mr. Parkinson, with a gesture, half-despairing, half-scornful, “I will take your silence for what it is worth. But listen to me. There appears to be a double villainy in this affair, and it shall be brought to light. In my daughter’s belief, the name of the man who betrayed her is Richard Hollingworth; and if your son’s name has been so used it has been used for a vile purpose, and your honour is concerned as well as my own—if you will excuse a common working man for speaking of his honour.”

“Nay, nay, Mr. Parkinson,” said Mr. Hollingworth, gently, “surely you will not do me a further injustice!”

“It is far from my wish, sir; but it is natural — perhaps you will admit it — that

words should escape me for which I ought not to be held strictly accountable. Again I ask your pardon. You have met me fairly, and I thank you for it. That is all, I think."

"Good night, Mr. Parkinson," said Mr. Hollingworth, holding out his hand. "There are reasons why I should say nothing further at present. I will make a point of calling upon you and your daughter, with my son, if you will permit me. And if I can in any way befriend you——"

"You can in one way," interrupted Mr. Parkinson, "and in one way only; by helping me unmask this villain and bringing him to justice. He has ruined my daughter's life, and I will ruin his if it is in my power—ay, I will, though it cost me the last drop of my blood. Good night, sir."

He turned to go, but stopped at the instance of Mr. Manners.

"One moment," said that gentleman;

“your visit here is at an end, and mine is nearly so. Would you have any objection to waiting for me below for two or three minutes? I wish to speak privately with you.”

“Will it serve any good purpose?” demanded Mr. Parkinson.

“It may,” replied Mr. Manners. “There are other wrongs than yours.”

“I don’t dispute it. But I am concerned only in my own. Excuse me for speaking roughly.”

“I excuse you readily, and may perhaps have cause to be grateful to you. Other persons whom you honour may also have cause to be grateful that what you had to say to this gentleman was said in my presence. Let this assurance content you, and give me the favour of your company when you leave this house.”

“I’ll do so, sir. I seem to be struggling in a net. A little mystery more or less won’t matter much.”

With a rough bow—in which there was some native grace of manner which well became him in his grief and perplexity—he left the room. The two gentlemen, being alone, waited each for the other to speak; but the silence was soon broken.

“The man’s tale is true,” said Mr. Hollingworth; “of that there can be no doubt. But I will not rashly commit myself to what may be an act of injustice. It remains for your nephew, Mr. Inglefield, to clear himself from the foul charge. If he cannot do so, he has played the part of an infamous scoundrel in the use he has made of my son’s name; it is conduct which cannot be forgiven. Why, he might have ruined my lad at the very outset of his public career! If you were in my place, with an only son, upon whom all your hopes were set—for, although he has a sister, a girl counts for very little—would you overlook an act so base?”

“No,” replied Mr. Manners. A sharp

pang had passed through him at Mr. Holingworth's reference to an only son. He thought of Kingsley, with his bright, ingenuous face, with his eager voice, and simple, loving ways, with his clear ideas of duty and honour. Yes, even duty, which in the years that were gone, he had accused Kingsley of forgetting and neglecting, crept into his mind side by side with honour. A rash act to marry without a father's consent, against a father's wishes; but Kingsley was ever rash and impulsive, but never in a dishonourable direction—never! And the step being taken, he did not flinch from its consequences. He had thrown in his hard fortune with the woman to whom he had pledged his faith, and had not for one instant wavered in the course he had believed it was right to follow. Would his nephew, Mark Inglefield, have stood so unflinchingly firm; would he have withstood temptation as Kingsley had done?

Mentally he surveyed the two men, and a sound like a groan escaped his lips.

“Have I pained you by my decision?” asked Mr. Hollingworth in a solicitous tone.

“No; it is just. My thoughts were upon another matter.”

The sadness of his voice impressed Mr. Hollingworth, and he remembered that Mr. Manners had an only son, whom he had cast off for disobedience. This remembrance came to him now with strange significance. Mr. Parkinson had mentioned the name of Mrs. Manners, and had described her as an angel of goodness. Was it possible that some close relation existed between these two who bore the same name?

“You had a son,” he ventured to say.

“Yes, I had a son,” said Mr. Manners, “who disappointed and disobeyed me.”

“Children have no appreciation of the

sacrifices parents make for them. I am sorry for you. I should not have spoken of him but for a reference made by the man who has just left us."

"Yes ; he spoke of a Mrs. Manners. The name is not a common one, and it may be——" He broke off here. "Mr. Hollingworth, it is not correct for me to say that my son disobeyed me, and you must not suppose that he was guilty of a dishonourable action. He was incapable of it."

"Is he living still ?" asked Mr. Hollingworth, laying his hand sympathisingly on his guest's shoulder.

"I do not know. I have heard nothing of him for years. We will not pursue the subject ; it is too painful, and I am waited for below. With respect to Mr. Inglefield, your best course will be to see or write to him. There need be no disguise. I myself shall speak to him, and shall mention names plainly."

"I will write to him to-night; he must know at once that his visits here are at an end, unless he has been maligned."

Mr. Manners found Mr. Parkinson waiting for him in the street.

"I could not stop in the house," he said, "there is something about it that suffocates me."

"I intended to ask you to walk with me to mine," said Mr. Manners.

"I will walk with you, but I refuse to enter it," rejoined Mr. Parkinson, roughly. "You are of course a rich man."

"Yes, I am rich."

"I am poor, and I will keep my place. It would be better for all of us if every man did the same. We can talk in the streets. It will serve some good purpose, you said. I ask nothing for myself, mind, nothing but justice."

"In the sad story you have told," said Mr. Manners, "you spoke of a woman who was kind to your daughter."

“I did, and what I said of her is true. She is an angel of goodness, and she saved my daughter, body and soul. See here, sir. I am not a church-going man, and I hate sanctimonious people, but I am not a heathen either. There’s some kind of a power that made the world and sent us into it for some purpose. I often wonder what, when I think of things. And there’s a Hereafter, and I’m glad to know it. I’ll tell you why I’m glad. Because, if that scoundrel that ruined my daughter escapes his punishment here—and I’ll do my best that he shan’t—but if he *does* escape it here, he’ll meet it there! That’s a satisfaction to me, and the thought of it will make me religious. I’ll go to church next Sunday.”

“My object in speaking to you now,” said Mr. Manners, “is to obtain information of Mrs. Manners. I gathered from what you said that she is poor.”

“Very poor,” said Mr. Parkinson, “and

that stands to her credit here, and 'll stand to her credit in the next world—if there's any justice there."

"In what way does it stand to her credit?"

Mr. Parker stopped suddenly to look at Mr. Manners' face, upon which the light of a street lamp was shining.

"You are asking close questions," he said, "and I'm getting suspicious of people."

"You are suspicious of me?"

"Put it as you like. You don't know me, and never heard of me before to-night, and I don't suppose you care a brass farthing whether you ever hear of me again. I never saw *you* before to-night, and I don't know your name even; so you have the advantage of me. You're in the light, you see, and I'm in the dark, and here we are talking together confidentially, with the difference that you know what you're talking about, and I don't. Stop a bit. I see you want to speak; but I

must work off my reel first. I don't care for interruptions. You've heard me tell my story; you've got in your mind my name, and my girl's name and shame, likewise the name of the man I'd take by the throat if he stood before me now and I knew it. Likewise the name of the angel woman who saved her, and who'd stand by her—I'll take my oath on it—if all the rest of the world was hounding her and throwing mud at her. Likely as not you're a friend of the scoundrel that's brought this upon us. I saw something in your face that makes me sure now he's not a stranger to you. He was a gentleman, so called; you're another. I've only got your word for it that the talk you're having with me is for a good purpose. It may be for a bad one. I've no call to trust you that I can see. Give me a reason."

"I find no fault with you for your suspicion of me. My name is Manners."

“ Oh ! And is the woman I'd die to serve a connection of yours ? ”

“ She may be. It is to ascertain whether she is that I am questioning you now.”

“ For a good purpose, you said ? ”

“ What I said I mean.”

“ Let me have another look at you.”

Again they stopped, and again Mr. Parkinson's eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Manners' face. He was to some extent apparently satisfied.

“ Go ahead,” he said.

“ You said,” resumed Mr. Manners, steadily, “ that her being poor, very poor, stands to her credit here, and will stand to her credit in another world, and I asked in what way.”

“ All right. You've got a clear head on you. In this way. She's got nothing to gain by it. What she does is done out of pure goodness—not only what she's done for

me and my girl, but what she does for every one who's in trouble. There isn't a face that don't light up when she comes by ; there isn't a lodging, the commonest you can think of, that isn't brightened when she opens the door. If she was to die to-morrow—the good Lord forbid that she should ! but I'm putting it that way to make it plain to you—if she was to die to-morrow, there'd be hundreds of us, men, women, and children, who'd follow her to the grave, and know that they'd lost a friend that could never be replaced. There would be no money to pay for a stone, but she'd have one in our hearts. God Almighty bless her and hers !”

CHAPTER V.

THE earnest sincerity of the grateful man shook Mr. Manners to the soul, and for once in his life his self-control slipped from him. He recovered himself quickly, but the impression produced by Mr. Parkinson's words remained.

"You speak," he said, "of a woman and her daughter who have laid you under an obligation——"

"A moment, if you please," interrupted Mr. Parkinson; "I spoke of a lady and her daughter. Mrs. Manners is a lady; we all know that, every one of us, and we've often wondered how she found her way among us, and how it is she is almost as poor as

the poorest of us. I object to your calling her a woman in a tone that means, if it means anything, that she is no better than the rest of us. It's clear enough to me that you look down on us. Well, look down. It doesn't hurt us, any more than it's to your credit."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Manners, gently; "I do not look down on you. I was once a working man myself." He sighed as he made the admission, at the thought that in those early days when he was struggling and making his way up the ladder, he was a happier man than he had ever been since.

"Were you?" exclaimed Mr. Parkinson, in wonder. "Let me think a bit. I remember when I was a boy hearing of a Mr. Manners, a great contractor, who was once no better than a bricklayer, and who had made himself a millionaire by his cleverness. It may be that you're the gentleman."

“I am he.”

“I take off my hat to you. I’m not one of the envious ones. You made your money fairly, I’ve heard, and though you drove hard bargains, you didn’t cut down wages.”

“That is true. I shall be pleased if you will reckon it to my credit now.”

“I’ll do that—it’s no more than fair. And the lady I speak of may be a connection of yours, you say. That’s interesting, though I never thought of linking you two together.”

“She never gave you cause to suspect it?”

“Never. If she had it would have been known and talked of. These things get about, you see.”

“What you say makes me think all the better of her. May I proceed with my questions?”

“You may.”

Had Mr. Manners been inclined to reflect,

in his usual spirit, under the peculiar nature of this conversation, he would have loftily resented Mr. Parkinson's occupation of the higher ground; but in truth there was that stirring within him which humbled him: and it is good to know that it humbled without mortifying him.

"Are Mrs. Manners and her daughter," he asked, "living alone? Is she a widow?"

"No," replied Mr. Parkinson. "She is married, and lives with her husband."

"Are you acquainted with his Christian name?"

"Yes. It is Kingsley."

A sigh of relief escaped Mr. Manners. He was not childless, then. It was still in his power to make reparation, or if not to make, to offer it. The latter alternative trod close upon the heels of the new-born impulse to atone for his harshness; the reflection intruded itself that his overtures towards a reconciliation might be declined. Many

years had passed since there was peace between him and his son, and during all those years he had been, figuratively speaking, rolling in gold. So vast was his fortune that, living the life he did, he could not spend one-half of it, and every day of his existence its colossal proportions grew. To Mark Inglefield he had made a most liberal allowance, and Inglefield, cunning and careful of the future, had occasionally drawn largely upon the great contractor's generosity. The requests he made were never refused, the reasons for them never inquired into. Mr. Manners had set store upon his wealth before he discarded his son; it meant then distinction, fame, political power, in which he would have a share. Kingsley's sense of right, no less than the ingenuousness and unselfishness of his nature, would have caused him to lay at his father's feet the honour and glory which he would assuredly have won had he been allowed to follow the career

which, in his young manhood, had been mapped out for him. The rich man's heart was tortured as the image of Kingsley rose before him; the frank, laughing mouth, the bright eyes, the eager manner, smote him now with more than the force of actual blows. Those he could have parried or returned; not so the accusing voices from the past which proclaimed him tyrannical, ruthless, and unjust. The manner of Kingsley's life, as indicated by Mr. Parkinson's championship of his wife and daughter, was an added sting to the torture he was suffering. Kingsley and those with whom he had, without a murmur, thrown in his lot, had borne privation and poverty cheerfully, and had won a place in the esteem and affections of the poor people around them of which the highest in the land might have been proud. And all this time it had been in his, the father's, power to have lightened and brightened their lot without in the

remotest degree feeling the loss ; and all this time they had lived and laboured without uttering one word of reproach against him whose unreasoning, dictatorial conduct had made their life a life of daily, hourly struggle ; and all this time they had made no appeal to him upon whom they had a just claim, but trod, with courage and resignation, the thorny paths into which he had thrust them. Well might he hide his face in his hands with shame. He thought of Nansie, and of the surprise he felt when he first saw her—surprise at her modesty and gentleness of manner, surprise at the soft pleading voice, surprise that she was a lady, fitted to grace any position to which wealth could raise her ; to grace and adorn it, and to bring into it qualities of goodness which would have made her a shining example amid the follies and frivolities of fashionable life. What were the grounds of his anger against her and his son ? That

Kingsley, meeting her, had fallen in love with her, and had wooed her honourably, and that she, urged in some degree by youth and love, and in some degree by Kingsley's confident view of the future, had accepted him and become his wife. How, then, was Nansie to be blamed? How had she merited the lot to which he had condemned her? And wherein lay Kingsley's misconduct? In that having wooed and won a lady, he had held an opinion of his father which placed Mr. Manners above the sordid considerations of a sordid age. That surely was not a crime; but the father and judge had viewed it as such, and had meted out a cruel punishment. Kingsley might have acted differently; he might have acted towards Nansie as Mark Inglefield had acted towards the working man, whose visit to Mr. Hollingworth had brought about disclosures which had led—and perhaps happily led—to the contemplations in which Mr.

Manners indulged as he stood in the dark night with Mr. Parkinson. The conversation between them had been continued, and Mr. Manners, anxious to obtain as much information as it was in Mr. Parkinson's power to impart, had been told of Kingsley's connection with the Wilberforce Club, and of the project to make him president in the place of Mr. Bartholomew. This project Kingsley himself had relinquished, further experience of the violent views of his partisans having convinced him that their methods were not such as he could approve of. Mr. Parkinson, being led on by Mr. Manners, dilated at some length on working men's politics in connection with Kingsley.

"Not so easily led as you would imagine, sir," observed Mr. Parkinson, referring to Kingsley's characteristics. "Sympathising with all who suffer from unjust and unequal laws, but staunch in his belief that those wrongs can only be set right by temperate

means. Mr. Kingsley Manners has a will of his own."

The father had already been compelled to acknowledge that. Strikingly different as he and his son were in their dispositions, they resembled each other in one respect; having resolved upon what they deemed right to do, they walked straight forward, regardless of consequences. Kingsley had done this in his relations with Nansie, and Mr. Manners had done this in his relations with his son. But Kingsley had sacrificed everything, his father nothing; and yet, of the two, Mr. Manners could not help confessing that the lot of the man who had cheerfully embraced poverty was the higher and nobler of the two.

"And now," said Mr. Parkinson, after further questions had been asked and answered, "I've told you all I know about Mr. and Mrs. Manners and their daughter,

and I should like to know what good it is going to do me."

"I do not follow you," said Mr. Manners.

"You've been so much occupied," explained Mr. Parkinson, "in the object you've been driving at, getting all you can out of me, and telling me precious little to enlighten me, that maybe you've lost sight of *my* story."

"I acknowledge it," said Mr. Manners.

"I told you," proceeded Mr. Parkinson, "when we were in Mr. Hollingworth's house, that I believed you knew who the man is who has wronged my child. I say so again. You *do* know him. Come, come, sir, I've played fair with you ; play fair with me."

"If the portrait you showed Mr. Hollingworth," said Mr. Manners, "is that of the man who has done you this wrong, I do know him."

"Thank you for that much. I'll trouble

you for his name. I don't want any one to take my quarrels on himself; I'm equal to them, and can carry them through. His name, sir, if you please."

"At present I must decline to give it to you," said Mr. Manners, and would have proceeded had he not been interrupted roughly by Mr. Parkinson, who exclaimed:

"That's the thanks I get! I might have known what to expect! But I'll find out where you live, and I'll dog you like your shadow till I come face to face with him."

"There is no cause for you to speak to me like that. I have told you who I am, and wished you to come with me to my house. Mr. Parkinson, you have done me a great service, and in return I would give you all the assistance in my power. But threats and violence will not help you here. For the present, leave your wrongs to me; it is not unlikely I may be able

to render you an infinitely greater service than you dream of. I ask you to trust me."

"For how long?"

"For a few days."

"Have you influence with the scoundrel?"

"I have."

A queer smile played about Mr. Parkinson's lips. "An infinitely greater service than I dream of," he said, repeating Mr. Manners' words. "Of course there's but one way of setting this thing right, and then I should lose my daughter. That's what we have children for—to plague, or torment, or disgrace us."

Mr. Manners laid his hand gently on Mr. Parkinson's arm, and said, "We bring such punishment upon ourselves often. Perhaps it is the parents, not the children, who are chiefly to blame. Good night, Mr. Parkinson. Here is my card; if you wish

to see me you are welcome at any time. If you do not come to me I will come to you. There is one other favour I would ask of you."

"Name it, sir."

"Say nothing to Mr. and Mrs. Manners of what has passed between us to-night; regard our interview as private, for a time at least."

"All right, sir. It shall be so. Good night."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. MANNERS had not far to go before he reached his house, but he lingered somewhat on the road, wrapped in thought. Had what was passing within him been revealed to any person long familiar with him, it would have inspired feelings of wonder and surprise. In truth, a great change was taking place in this man's nature; he was no longer stern, self-willed, and arrogant; he was conscious of a certain humbleness of spirit, and he yielded to its influence. His thoughts were chiefly upon Kingsley and Nansie; what he had heard concerning them had touched him nearly; it had, as it were, opened a window in

his soul which had been darkened all his life. But now and again his thoughts wandered to Mark Inglefield, and he dwelt upon the contrast between this man and his son. Kingsley so impetuous, open-minded, and frank, Inglefield so cool, methodical, and wary; the one wearing his heart upon his sleeve, the other keeping strict watch upon it, so that he might not be tempted to follow its impulses to his own disadvantage. The links which united Mr. Manners and Mark Inglefield were strong ones, and had been forged by Mr. Manners himself. When he discarded his son, and made up his mind to leave England, perhaps for ever, he had made certain propositions to Mark Inglefield which had been eagerly accepted. Inglefield was to be his companion, his second son, and was to devote himself entirely to his patron, to be as it were at his beck and call, and subservient and obedient in all things. That the com-

panionship had been productive of little pleasure was perhaps as much the fault of one as of the other. Disappointed in his dearest wishes, Mr. Manners' principal desire was to be left to himself, and Mark Inglefield humoured him; careful ever to be ready when called upon to perform some duty, never contradicting his patron, never arguing with him; a willing, submissive slave, waiting for his reward in the future. This reward had been promised him; he was to be Mr. Manners' heir. The prospect was a glowing one, and he revelled in it, although there were occasions when a great wave of discontent swept over him. He was not a young man; how long would he have to wait? Mr. Manners was his senior by twenty-five years, but his health was perfect. It was his boast that he had never had a day's illness in his life, and his habits were such that there seemed little probability of his breaking down before he

was a very old man. Luxuriousness of living had no temptations for him ; plain fare sufficed for his needs. Mark Inglefield, on the contrary, was fond of rich food and rich wines, and he indulged in them ; his tastes (in which may be included his vices) were the very reverse of Mr. Manners', and if he chafed under the restraint in which he was held he was careful not to betray himself to his patron. He took his pleasures in secret, and was not sparing of them ; and it was a proof that he was an able and astute man, cunning in device and richly capable in deceit, that not a whisper of those doings which would have been reckoned to his disadvantage had ever reached Mr. Manners' ear.

"Is Mr. Inglefield in his room ?" asked Mr. Manners of the servant who opened the door.

"No, sir," was the reply.

Mr. Manners passed up to his own, in which the gas was lighted, and paced it

slowly in deep thought, with his hands clasped behind him. The house was the same he had built during the time he was resolving upon Kingsley's future and the position he was to occupy in the world. He remembered that then he had in view a lady whom Kingsley was to wed, and through whom he was to obtain immediate entry and recognition into the highest circles of society. All the years that Mr. Manners had been abroad the magnificent house had been left in the charge of caretakers, the owner not caring to let or part with it. There was another motive. Despite the apparent irrevocableness of the break between him and Kingsley, there lurked in Mr. Manners' mind the latent hope that something—he knew not what, and had not the courage to mentally inquire—might occur which might bring them together again. He would do nothing to bring this about, but the possibility existed, and for

awhile was dimly recognised. Gradually it faded into mere nothingness and was lost sight of, but by that time Mr. Manners had become too indifferent to the making of money to turn his investment to account.

He had left this house with his wife and Mark Inglefield. He returned with Mark Inglefield, having buried his wife in a foreign country. Between her and him no mention had been made of their son from the day of the renouncement. On that day he had said to his wife, "I will not allow his name to be uttered in my presence." He was her master as well as her husband, and she had grown to fear him. Whether in the depths of her heart she had preserved some touch of that most sacred of human attributes, a mother's love for her only child, was never known to Mr. Manners. She obeyed him implicitly in this as in all other matters, and even on her deathbed Kingsley's name did not pass her lips. But now, in the solitude of his room, Mr. Manners

recalled those last minutes on earth of the woman he had sworn to cherish, and it came to his gentler self to place a new meaning on the wistful look in her eyes as she turned them upon him for the last time. "She was thinking of Kingsley." He did not speak the words, but they could not have been plainer to his sense had he uttered them aloud.

He went up to his wife's room, the room in which he had deposited all the mementoes of her silent life which he had brought home with him. Her jewels were there, her desk, and an old trunk which from sentiment she had preserved from the days of her maidenhood. In her desk he found a bunch of keys, and one of these fitted the trunk, which now lay open before him. He had never before looked into this trunk, and he could not have told what he expected to find there ; but what he saw now stood witness against him. From the grave in a foreign land came the accusation.

Nothing of his dead wife's was in the trunk, nothing that she had worn or that he had given her. Everything it contained had belonged to Kingsley. Portraits, school books, articles of dress, and many items insignificant and worthless in themselves, but deeply precious in their spiritual significance. Here was the mother's heart portrayed, here the record of her inner life and sufferings, to which she had never given utterance. All the more potent now in their silent testimony. The proud man read in these trifles his condemnation. With a little quivering of his mouth which he made no effort to control, he closed the trunk and locked it, and left the room, treading softly.

In the passage he lingered a few moments, wrestling with an inward urging to visit the room which Kingsley used to occupy, and which was situated on the floor above. With something of his old master-

fulness he wheeled suddenly round, and returned to his own apartment. There, however, the desire manifested itself more strongly, and yielding to it he soon found himself in Kingsley's room, which he had not visited since the day on which he had conducted Nansie thither, with the endeavour to impress upon her the great sacrifice which she would force Kingsley to make if she did not herself take steps to separate from him. Here, again, Mr. Manners was confronted with accusing testimony, for, from surrounding evidence, he saw that his wife had been in the habit of sitting in this room, and frequently occupying it after their son's departure. These signs of suppressed suffering, of anguish borne in silence, could not fail to impress him; nor could he fail to be impressed by the once familiar objects in which Kingsley took pride. The books, the bed, the articles of taste and value, the pipes, even some bits of jewellery — it seemed as if

nothing had been removed or disturbed. Mr. Manners was both surprised and touched ; these things were Kingsley's own, and he might have taken them and converted them into money, which the father knew had been sadly needed. "Kingsley was never mercenary," thought Mr. Manners, with a pitiful smile of mingled pride and humiliation. "The soul of honour and generosity !"

He returned again to his room, and had not been in it a minute before he heard the sound of a step on the stairs. He threw open the door, and Mark Inglefield appeared.

"I hardly knew whether you would be home so early," said the expectant heir. "Did you leave Mr. Hollingworth well ?"

The object of Mr. Manners' visit to that gentleman was, of course, known to Mark Inglefield, who looked upon this day as the red-letter day of his life. In the event of Mr. Manners arranging the marriage between

him and Mr. Hollingworth's daughter, all anxiety for the future was at an end. Mr. Manners had promised to make at once a settlement upon him which would place him above all the chances and caprices of fickle fortune. For some time past he had found the ties which bound him to his patron irksome and disagreeable; he was hardly his own master; and to all the hints he had thrown out that he might fairly claim to be placed in a more independent position, Mr. Manners had replied:

“Wait till you are settled.”

It was, indeed, this consideration that had impelled him to urge on the marriage. He had as little true love for Miss Hollingworth as the young lady had for him. She plays no part in this story, but it is necessary to say that she was a thoroughly worldly young person, with a full appreciation of the worldly advantage of marrying the heir of a millionaire. In their matrimonial views, there-

fore, she and Mark Inglefield were on an equality ; the marriage into which they were willing to enter was a marriage of convenience, and they were content to leave the preliminaries in the hands of their elders.

Mark Inglefield put on an air of anxiety as he asked Mr. Manners if he had left Mr. Hollingworth well. He knew the exact value of his part in the projected alliance, but he had represented to Mr. Manners that his heart was deeply engaged, and he laboured under the belief that he had succeeded in throwing dust into his patron's eyes. Mark Inglefield had a remarkable opinion of his own capacity and capabilities, and, during his long relations with Mr. Manners, had grown extremely confident of himself and his powers, and somewhat scornful of Mr. Manners' force of character. The reason for this was that the two men never came into collision ; their opinions never clashed. This might have occurred in the early years

of their association had not Mark Inglefield tutored himself into complete subservience to a will which he had reason to know was imperious ; but as time wore on Mr. Manners' interest in the affairs of life grew weaker, and Mark Inglefield made the mistake of attributing this indifference to failing mental power. Hence the growing scorn of his patron's character, which, once respected and feared, he now held in small esteem.

"Mr. Hollingworth is well in health," said Mr. Manners.

Mark Inglefield detected nothing significant in the tone, and was not in the least disturbed.

"I hope the interview was satisfactory," he said.

"Not entirely," replied Mr. Manners.

This did produce some slight discomfiture in the younger man.

"I thought," he remarked, "that every-

thing was understood, and that it was a mere matter of arrangement of practical details."

"I thought so, too," said Mr. Manners. "Something else, however, has cropped up, which needs explanation."

"From me?" inquired Mr. Inglefield.

"From you," said Mr. Manners.

All Mark Inglefield's astuteness came instantly into play; no wariness was expressed in his face, for the reason that he had complete control over himself, and, on his mettle, was seldom, if ever, to be taken at a disadvantage.

"I am ready to give any explanation that may be required," he said, in a tone of modest assurance. "Perhaps it was hardly to be expected that an affair of such importance could be settled without some trifling hitch."

It was in his mind to say that the required explanation was nothing that affected

his character, but he was prudent enough to arrest the words. No one knew better than himself that this was dangerous ground to approach. If anything was to be said upon the point, it must not come from him.

“I was not prepared for any hitch,” said Mr. Manners. “When I visited Mr. Hollingworth this evening, I believed that everything would be arranged as you wished.”

“And as you also wished,” said Mark Inglefield, quickly.

“Yes; although my interest in the negotiation was naturally less than yours. Do not stand, Inglefield; what we have to say to each other will occupy a few minutes.”

Mark Inglefield, with inward anxiety and a cheerful exterior, drew a chair to the table and sat down.

“Do you love the young lady?” inquired Mr. Manners.

“If I did not,” replied Mark Inglefield,

wondering at the strangeness of the question, "should I desire to marry her?"

"That is scarcely an answer," observed Mr. Manners.

And now Mark Inglefield suspected that a battle was impending, and that something serious was coming.

"Certainly I love her," he said. "Is there any doubt of it, and is that the difficulty?"

"That is not the difficulty, but it strikes me now as singular that love was never mentioned in the course of the interview."

For the life of him Mark Inglefield could not help remarking :

"I was not aware that you were given to sentiment."

"Nor am I," retorted Mr. Manners. "I have been all my life a practical man, until lately, when life seems to have been valueless to me."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," said Mark Inglefield, with well-simulated sympathy.

"The sentimental view of a question," continued Mr. Manners, "is a view I have always ignored. I set my own course, and rightly or wrongly, have followed it. Whether it has brought me happiness or not affects myself only."

"Pardon me for venturing to differ from you," said Mark Inglefield, thinking he saw what might be turned to his advantage; "what you decide upon may affect others as well as yourself."

"I am corrected; it may, and has."

Mark Inglefield inwardly congratulated himself. Not a suspicion crossed his mind that he and Mr. Manners, in this contention, were mentally travelling different roads. He was thinking only of his own interests; Mr. Manners was thinking of Kingsley.

“May I ask,” said Mark Inglefield, “whether Miss Hollingworth was present during your interview with her father?”

“She was present at no part of it,” replied Mr. Manners.

“Then the difficulty you refer to did not spring from her.

“It did not.”

“Nor from you, I hope, sir?”

“No, nor from me.”

“Surely Mr. Hollingworth raised no objection?”

“He was not the originator of it.”

Mark Inglefield took heart of grace. Whatever grievance had arisen—and he was too wary to demand its nature with any show of indignation; it might lead to the idea that he himself was conscious of something blamable in his conduct; it was by far the best to avoid anything that savoured of heat, and to maintain the attitude he had always assumed with Mr. Manners—whatever

grievance, then, had arisen must be purely imaginary, and could be easily explained away.

“I await your pleasure,” he said, “and am ready, as I have already stated, to give you any explanation you require.”

“The interview between Mr. Hollingworth and myself,” said Mr. Manners, his eyes fixed upon Mark Inglefield’s face, in which no trace of discomposure was visible, “was nearly at an end, when a visitor was announced. It is not my habit to beat about the bush, Inglefield. The name of this visitor was Parkinson.”

Not a muscle in Mark Inglefield’s features twitched, although he recognised at once the precipice upon which he was standing.

“Parkinson,” he repeated, in a tone of unconcern.

“Do you know a man of that name?” asked Mr. Manners.

“Parkinson ! Parkinson !” said Mark

Inglefield, as though searching his memory.
“No. I am not acquainted with any man bearing that name.”

“Nor with any woman?”

“Nor with any woman,” replied Mark Inglefield, coolly.

“It is only fair that you should be told what this man revealed.”

“If it affects me, certainly, though I am completely in the dark. The person was admitted, then?”

“He would not be denied. It appears that he has called repeatedly at Mr. Hollingworth’s house, with the purpose of seeing that gentleman, and he refused to go away now without being satisfied.”

“As you evidently suppose me to be implicated in the revelation—I adopt your own term, sir—he made, I am entitled to ask whether he is a gentleman.”

“He is a working man.”

Mark Inglefield leant back in his chair

with an air of content, expressing in this action a consciousness of complete innocence.

“I was really beginning to fear,” he said, “that a charge had been brought against me by one whose words would have some weight.”

“Mr. Parkinson’s words had considerable weight,” said Mr. Manners, “and the tale he related was true.”

“It is not for me to dispute with you, but I am all curiosity, sir.”

“Before I recount the shameful story he related, of which you appear ignorant——”

“Of which I *am* ignorant,” interposed Mark Inglefield.

“It is but right,” continued Mr. Manners, ignoring the interruption, “that I should make reference to a certain understanding between ourselves. I refer to the promise I gave you to make you my heir.” Mark Inglefield caught his breath, and his face grew a shade paler. “This promise, in

effect, as we sit together here to-night, is already fulfilled. My will is made out to that end."

Mark Inglefield recovered himself. What need was there for anxiety? The blow was unexpected and crushing, but he would prove himself a clumsy bungler indeed if he were unable to parry it.

"I have never had any uneasiness on that score, sir," he said. "Your promised word was sufficient assurance. The trust, the confidence you reposed in me cannot be shaken by false statements."

"It is not for me to say," remarked Mr. Manners, "at the present juncture, whether the statements made by Mr. Parkinson are true or false; but as they stand they affect you vitally, so far as worldly circumstances go. I do not hold myself bound by my promise if I find I have been deceived in you. It was given to a man of honour. Prove

yourself so, and you shall not be disappointed, although some small share of my wealth may be otherwise bestowed. But I tell you frankly that I intend, quite apart from what you may have to say, to sift this man's story to the bottom, and to come to the truth of it. You have not lived with me all these years, Inglefield, without knowing that when I announce an intention I shall carry it out to its end. Mr. Parkinson's story, and other disclosures of which it formed the groundwork, have deeply affected me, and may have a strong bearing upon the small span of life which is yet left to me. I am speaking to you openly, because the occasion demands it. Quite independent of the wrong of which Mr. Parkinson justly complains, there are matters of which I intend to speak to you. Shall we go into them to-night, or would you prefer to defer their consideration till the morning?"

“To-night, sir, to-night,” exclaimed Mark Inglefield, with an exhibition of great indignation. “I could not sleep until I have removed from your mind the unjust suspicions which have been planted there by a man who is an utter stranger to me.”

CHAPTER VII.

MARK INGLEFIELD'S assumption of virtuous indignation would have been supplanted by a feeling of veritable consternation, had he been aware of what was passing through the mind of his patron. Mr. Manners owed it to himself, and was fully determined, to lay bare the naked truth of Mr. Parkinson's story; but, true or false, it was of small importance to him, in comparison with the feelings which had been aroused within him by the description which Mr. Parkinson had given of Kingsley and Nansie. He had promised to make Mark Inglefield his heir, and if this man succeeded in freeing himself from the charge which had been laid

against him, the promise should be fulfilled. But he had not pledged himself to leave Inglefield the whole of his property. There was enough and to spare for ample provision for the son he had discarded, and to whom now, at the eleventh hour, his heart was turning. He had never entertained any strong affection for Inglefield. In the early days of their association he had endeavoured to acquire a feeling of sentiment towards his nephew, in order that the alienation between himself and Kingsley should be complete and irrevocable; but Inglefield was not gifted with the qualities to win such an affection. Failing this, he and Mr. Manners travelled together more as ordinary acquaintances than warm friends; and as time wore on the opportunity of drawing them closer together was lost.

“We will first,” said Mr. Manners, “dispose, as far as we can, of the wrongs of which Mr. Parkinson complains. I say as

far as we can, because I wish you to distinctly understand that I intend myself to investigate the matter."

"I understand so, sir," said Mark Inglefield, inwardly cursing Mr. Manners for his obstinacy.

"You should be glad that I have resolved upon this course. Declaring yourself innocent, as you do, the result should more completely exonerate you. In which case Mr. Hollingworth will doubtless adhere to the alliance which I went to his house to-night to complete."

"Otherwise he will not?"

"Otherwise he will not," said Mr. Manners. "Do you wish to hear the words he uttered with respect to you?"

"It will be best," said Mark Inglefield.

"Mr. Parkinson's story being told, he left the house, and Mr. Hollingworth and I remained in conference for a few minutes. It was then that Mr. Hollingworth said: 'It

remains for your nephew, Mr. Inglefield, to clear himself from this foul charge. If he cannot do so, he has played the part of an infamous scoundrel.' Strong words, Inglefield."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Inglefield, "and that they should be used towards me fills me with indignation and amazement."

"Innocent, your feelings are justifiable, and you will find Mr. Hollingworth ready to make amends. In what he said I fully concurred. I will explain as briefly as possible the matter of which Mr. Parkinson complains. He is a working man, living in the east of London. He has one child, a young woman named Mary." Mr. Manners paused; Mark Inglefield never winced. "This daughter, it appears," continued Mr. Manners, "has fallen a victim to the designs of a scoundrel. She fled from her home at this scoundrel's instigation, who, wearying of her, deserted her

and left her, ruined and penniless, to die or pursue her life of shame."

"It is not at all an unusual story," said Mark Inglefield, apparently listening to the narrative with great interest, "but I fail to see its relation with me."

"Had it not been," continued Mr. Manners, "for the kindness of a lady who, according to Mr. Parkinson, is universally beloved for her goodness of heart, the unhappy girl, driven to despair, would probably have committed suicide; but this lady——"

"Lady, sir?" interrupted Mark Inglefield, noting with curiosity a certain emphasis of tenderness which, unconsciously to himself, Mr. Manners put upon the word.

"I said a lady, although she is as poor as those among whom she lived."

"Ah," sneered Mark Inglefield, "a piece of working man's claptrap, introduced for

the purpose of imposing upon your benevolence."

"I am not noted for benevolence," said Mr. Manners, drily; "it would not have been to my discredit had I been more charitable in my career."

Mark Inglefield stared at his patron. This was a new phase in the rich man's character, and, with his altered demeanour, for which Inglefield could discover no explicable reason, boded changes. Still he did not lose his self-possession.

"Of every twenty who beg of you," he said, "nineteen are rank impostors."

"Possibly; but that does not affect our present business. The lady I refer to stepped in at a critical moment, nursed the poor girl and brought her to reason, and finally succeeded in reconciling her father with her, who received her again in his home."

"Ah!" thought Mark Inglefield, "Mary is at home, then. I shall know where to find

her." Aloud he said: "Why do you pause, sir?"

"I supposed you were about to speak," replied Mr. Manners.

"No. I was only thinking that this Mr. Parkinson was not a bad sort of fellow."

"Because of his reconciliation with his only child," asked Mr. Manners, "who not only offended but disgraced him?"

"Yes, because of that," said Mark Inglefield.

"It speaks well for him?"

"Yes." Almost upon the utterance of the word there came to Mark Inglefield the recollection of the estrangement between Mr. Manners and his only child; and now there occurred to him that behind this story of Mary Parkinson there lay something which might be of almost equal consequence to his prospects. All the cunning forces of his nature took array within him, and stood on

the alert for the protection of their wily master. The affair was beginning to assume a more serious aspect. Well, he was prepared to battle with it.

“I am pleased to hear your opinion, Inglefield,” said Mr. Manners; “it coincides with mine.” (“I was right,” thought Inglefield.) “The daughter, however,” pursued Mr. Manners, “again in her home, was most unhappy, from a cause which her father had not suspected. He set a watch upon her, to discover the cause of her unhappiness, and soon found that he was threatened by another disgrace. Maddened by this discovery, he questioned his daughter, and pressed her to give him the name of her betrayer. She refused.” (“Good girl!” thought Mark Inglefield; “staunch girl! I am safe.”) “Mr. Parkinson was not the kind of man, with this additional disgrace hanging over him, to rest contented with the refusal, and he adopted the extreme measure of breaking

open his daughter's box, in which he found the portrait of a man, a stranger to him. On the back of this portrait a name was written." (Mark Inglefield smiled placidly. "I never gave her a portrait of myself," he thought, "though she begged often for one. Nor has she a scrap of my writing to bring against me. You were ever prudent, Mark. You will get over this difficulty, have no fear.") Mr. Manners had observed the placid smile, but he made no comment on it. "It happened that the name written on the back of the picture has just been brought into prominence, and with this double clue in his possession, Mr. Parkinson sought, and after some difficulty obtained, an interview with Mr. Hollingworth, in which he told the story I have narrated to you. Are you curious to learn the reason of his desire to speak with Mr. Hollingworth?"

"It would be strange," said Mark Inglefield, "if I were not interested in anything

concerning a family with which I hope to be soon connected by marriage."

"Mr. Parkinson accused Mr. Hollingworth's son, Richard, who has just won his election, of being Mary Parkinson's betrayer. Shocked at the charge, Mr. Hollingworth demanded some better proof than Mr. Parkinson's bare word, and the wronged father produced it. He handed the portrait he had found in his daughter's box to Mr. Hollingworth, and stated how it had come into his possession. The name written on the back of the photograph was Richard Hollingworth."

"In whose writing?" asked Mark Inglefield.

"In Mary Parkinson's. But the portrait was not that of Richard Hollingworth."

"Whose then, sir?"

"Yours."

Mark Inglefield started, and could have lashed himself for this exhibition of surprise.

“Surely,” he said, “upon such evidence you do not accuse me?”

“I accuse no one. I must not forget to inform you that when Mr. Parkinson found the portrait he forced from his daughter the confession that it was that of her betrayer, who had the audacity and the infamy to present himself to her under the guise of a friend. Mr. Richard Hollingworth was your friend. Inglefield, I have purposely used these two strong words ‘infamy’ and ‘audacity.’ Do you agree with me that such conduct on the part of any man was audacious and infamous?”

“I agree with you entirely,” replied Mark Inglefield, who, although he felt as if he was being caught in a trap, still spoke in a calm voice, and was busily casting about for ways and means to get out of it. “But I repeat, you would surely not accuse — nay, not only accuse, but convict me upon such evidence?”

“I have already told you that I accuse no one ; still less would I convict without absolute proof. Very little more remains to be told of this shameful story. Mr. Hollingworth, upon seeing the portrait, indignantly defended his son, whose prospects of a public, honourable career would have been blasted had he been dragged into the courts, charged with a crime so vile, and he made the promise to Mr. Parkinson that if it should be proved that Richard Hollingworth was the betrayer, the young gentleman should make the girl the only reparation in the power of an honourable man.”

“Marry her ? ”

“That was his undoubted meaning.”

“It was a convenient promise,” said Mark Inglefield, with easy assurance. “Had the portrait been that of his son he would not have made it. Mr. Hollingworth is a man of the world.”

“There is no need for us to discuss that

point. Your remark does you no credit, Inglefield."

"It was founded, sir," said Mark Inglefield, in a tone of respectful deference, "upon a knowledge of Mr. Hollingworth's character."

"Mr. Hollingworth would not thank you for that."

"Possibly not. Still I speak as a man of the world, as you know me to be, and as you are yourself. A man's experience must count in such matters. Is your story ended, sir?"

"Very nearly. When I left Mr. Hollingworth he expressed the intention of writing to you to-night, to the effect that your visits to his house must cease until you have cleared yourself. You will receive his letter in the morning. Mr. Parkinson also said something with which you should be made acquainted. He said you had ruined his daughter's life, and he made the solemn declaration that he would ruin yours if it cost him the last drop of his blood."

“He knows my name, then?”

“He does not. Neither Mr. Hollingworth nor I enlightened him.”

“That was only fair to me, sir. My good reputation is as dear to me as any man’s. All the time you have known me there has been nothing dishonourable laid to my charge.”

“I know of nothing, Inglefield; but then our courses have lain somewhat apart. There should certainly, in our relations, have been a closer confidence. However, all that is past, and it is not given to us to recall our actions. Now that we are speaking together, openly and frankly, there must be no reservations. I have plainly indicated to you the course I have resolved upon with respect to the story of Mary Parkinson. I have pledged myself to assist him in obtaining justice, and you know that I shall keep my word. Let me tell you that there appears to be something strange in your attitude on this question.”

“What do you expect of me? I can afford to treat with quiet scorn the accusation which you seem to favour against me.”

“You are still on the wrong tack—a surprise to me in a man of so much intelligence. I expected from you something more than general statements.”

“If you would put direct questions to me,” said Mark Inglefield, who all this time was in serious mental debate with himself, “I should cease from unconsciously offending you. I owe you much, sir, and all my future prospects depend upon you. Recognising and acknowledging this, it would be the height of folly in me to disappoint you in any way; but I repeat, I am in the dark as to what you expect from me.”

“You would prefer that I should ask straight questions?”

“It is my wish.”

“I will do so. You are now acquainted

with the disgraceful story which has caused both Mr. Hollingworth and myself to assume an attitude towards you for which we shall fully atone if we are satisfied there are no grounds for it. You do not know any person, male or female, bearing the name of Parkinson ? ”

“ I do not.”

“ Do you deny that you are, directly or indirectly, connected with the wrong of which Mr. Parkinson complains ? ”

“ I deny it emphatically.” Mark Inglefield said it boldly, and met Mr. Manners’ gaze unflinchingly.

“ That is plain speaking,” said Mr. Manners. “ You must pardon me if I widen the matter a little. It is far from my wish to pry into your private concerns, but to some extent they affect me.”

“ You have every right to inquire into them,” said Mark Inglefield ; and now that he was launched on a full tide of deceit and

treachery, determined to override every obstacle and to overcome every danger, there was nothing in his voice or manner to which the most suspicious person could take exception. "Every action in my life is open for your inspection."

"The man who has wronged Mr. Parkinson's daughter presented himself to her under a false name. She may have done the same to him."

"I understand what you mean, sir," said Mark Inglefield, not giving Mr. Manners time to finish, "and I declare, upon my honour as a gentleman, that there lives not a woman in the world who can complain of wrong at my hands. Is that sufficiently comprehensive, sir?"

"So far as Mary Parkinson is concerned," replied Mr. Manners, "it covers the whole ground, although it does not clear up the mystery."

"What is it that remains to be cleared?"

Is not my word of honour as a gentleman of more weight than the false statements of a shallow, ignorant woman?"

"You are speaking with unnecessary heat," said Mr. Manners, calmly. "In a few hours, by a very simple process, the matter can be settled. To-morrow morning you will accompany me to Mr. Parkinson's home—I have the address—and there, face to face with him and his daughter, you will be able in a moment to convince them how you have been maligned."

"Surely, sir," remonstrated Mark Inglefield, to whom this proposal brought a feeling of consternation, "you do not really mean to drag both yourself and me personally into this disgraceful affair?"

"What can you find to object to in it?" asked Mr. Manners. "I have pledged myself to sift the matter to the bottom, and I am not the man to depart from my word. The course I propose is an honourable course,

and the result must be your complete vindication. At the present moment you are under suspicion; you cannot wish to remain so. Of course, Inglefield, I cannot compel you to accompany me. If you refuse——”

Mr. Manners paused, but the uncompleted sentence was sufficiently comprehensive. Thus driven, there was no alternative before Mark Inglefield than to cry with great warmth:

“I do not refuse.”

“You will accompany me?”

“Yes, sir, willingly, as you attach so much importance to it.”

“I attach the most serious importance to it. We will start at eleven o’clock in the morning, and will go by train. To drive there would attract notice, which it is my desire, for more reasons than one, to avoid. It is agreed, then?”

“Yes, sir, it is agreed.”

“There is an aspect of this unfortunate

affair," said Mr. Manners, "which seems not to have occurred to you."

"What is it, sir?" asked Mark Inglefield, whose inward perturbation was not lessened by the continuance of the conversation.

"Think, Inglefield. I would prefer that it should come from you, instead of from me."

"I can think of nothing," said Mark Inglefield, speaking now with sincere ingenuousness. "So far as I can see, we have threshed it completely out."

"Take a moment or two to consider. I am really anxious that it should occur to you."

Mark Inglefield pondered; but so entirely engrossed was he by the main issue—which now, indeed, he recognised was vital to his prospects—that there was no room in his mind for small side issues. He found himself incapable of wresting his thoughts from the one grand point—how was he to avoid

this personal meeting with Mary Parkinson in the presence of her father and Mr. Manners?

"I can think of nothing," he said, presently.

"Then I must remind you," said Mr. Manners, coldly, "that Mary Parkinson has your portrait in her possession."

"True, sir, true," exclaimed Mark Inglefield. "How could it have escaped me? And now that you have reminded me, I believe you said that the girl herself unblushingly proclaimed that the portrait was that of her betrayer." He said this glibly; a plan was forming in his mind by which he could avert the threatened danger.

"She proclaimed it," responded Mr. Manners, "so Mr. Parkinson informed me, but I do not think I said she proclaimed it unblushingly; I had no warranty for saying so."

"The expression is mine, and fits the

case; she has trumped up the story, very likely at the instigation of her accomplice."

"If that is so he proves himself a clumsy scoundrel. Your statements established, Inglefield, you must bring this man to justice. It is a conspiracy to ruin you, therefore a criminal offence."

"You may depend," said Mark Inglefield, vivaciously—his plan was formed, and he was confident of success—"that I shall not allow this scoundrel to escape me."

"We will dismiss the matter for to-night," said Mr. Manners; "be sure that you are ready at eleven in the morning. And now I wish to speak to you upon another matter."

"Very well, sir," said Inglefield, and thought: "What is the old fool going to bring forward now?"

CHAPTER VIII.

“I TOLD you,” said Mr. Manners, “that the matter we have left is one vital to your interests. The matter we are now approaching is vital to mine.”

“I am sure, sir,” said Inglefield, wondering, “anything I can do to serve you——”

“The truth will serve me ; nothing less. How long is it since you saw my son, Kingsley ?”

“A great many years,” replied Inglefield, with a fainting heart.

Here was another unforeseen danger threatening him, for there was nothing of harshness or severity in Mr. Manners’ voice ; it was, indeed, gentle and tender.

“How long since you have heard of him?”

“Nearly as long. I never corresponded with him, you know. It was enough for me that he offended and deceived you—you, the best of men and fathers!”

Mr. Manners gazed at Mark Inglefield in surprise. This reference to himself as the best of men and fathers was new to him, and from such a quarter quite unexpected.

“I do not deserve your good opinion,” he said; “I am not the best of men, and have not been the best of fathers.”

“Let others judge,” murmured Inglefield.

“They would condemn me, but not more strongly than I condemn myself.”

“Why do you agitate yourself, sir?” said Inglefield. “The affair is dead and buried long ago. You have no cause for reproach.”

“It is because I have true cause for reproach that I am tortured now. Wrongs

may be buried, but they do not die. They live to bear after-fruit."

He leant his head upon his hand, and a thought flashed suddenly into Mark Inglefield's mind.

"The past has been recalled to you, sir," he said, in a tone of false commiseration, "in some special way."

"Yes, Inglefield."

"Through this Mr. Parkinson?" asked Inglefield.

"Yes, through him."

"Ah," cried Inglefield, "then these men are acquainted with each other."

"These men?" repeated Mr. Manners, in inquiry.

"Mr. Parkinson and your son," replied Inglefield, somewhat confused by the question.

"Yes, they are acquainted with each other."

"Then it is your son," exclaimed Ingle-

field, starting to his feet with a show of passion which was not entirely simulated, "I have to thank for the vile accusation which has been brought against me! It is him I have to thank for blackening my character! And it is by these means that he, after all these years, endeavours to supplant me in your respect!"

"Restrain yourself," said Mr. Manners. "You are doing Kingsley an injustice. With what has passed between us he has nothing whatever to do."

"Then how comes it, sir," demanded Inglefield, speaking still with violence, "that this Mr. Parkinson, this sham working man—oh, I know them, sir; they trade upon the term, and twist it artfully to their own advantage—how comes it, I ask, that this Parkinson visited Mr. Hollingworth with this trumped-up story while you were with that gentleman? Why, the plot is as clear

as daylight! I see it all. The shameless villains!"

"Stop, Inglefield," said Mr. Manners, sternly; "I will not allow you to brand my son with such an epithet. Recall it."

"At your bidding, yes, sir. But none the less am I amazed that you should permit yourself to be duped by such a barefaced, superficial trick."

"How was it possible," asked Mr. Manners, "that Mr. Parkinson knew that I was with Mr. Hollingworth when he called?"

"How was it possible, sir? There was no difficulty in ascertaining a fact so simple. It belongs to the deep-laid plot by which my enemies hope to ruin me."

"Once more I tell you," said Mr. Manners, "that the expectations I have held out to you shall be fulfilled to your satisfaction, if you clear yourself of the charge

in relation to Mary Parkinson. Be wise, Inglefield; I am not a man to be lightly trifled with, especially at a time like this, when you can see I am deeply moved. Whether Mary Parkinson's story affects you or not, it is a true story; there is no room for doubt; and the introduction of my son's name into it was not premeditated."

"What is it you wish of me?" asked Inglefield, seating himself sullenly.

"Some assistance in recalling what I learnt from your lips with respect to my son and his wife."

"Well, sir, I am bound to obey you, though the subject is intensely painful to me."

"How much more painful must it be to me when I have heard that which leads me to doubt the justice of an act which condemned my son to a life of privation!"

"What you have heard from Mr. Parkinson to-night, sir?"

“Yes, from Mr. Parkinson. Inglefield, I remember that you spoke of the lady who won Kingsley’s love as an artful, designing woman. If I am exaggerating, correct me.”

“I certainly said little in her favour,” replied Mark Inglefield, sullenly and ungraciously. There could have been no more unwelcome topic than this, and it was broached at a time when all his attention and skill were required to ward off impending ruin. It proved that he was a man of infinite resource that two such blows dealt at once and so unexpectedly, did not completely confound him.

“You must be a great deal more explicit with me, Inglefield,” said Mr. Manners. “You said nothing in her favour.”

“Well, sir, if you will have it so.”

Mr. Manners frowned.

“It is not as I would have it; it is or is not the truth.”

“I have no intention of denying it;” and

here came a cunning stroke. "Consider, sir. Is it not natural that I should be to some extent unbalanced by what has transpired?"

"Yes, it is natural, Inglefield, and I will excuse much. But I must have plain answers to my questions, or I shall ask you nothing further."

CHAPTER IX.

THE turn which this conversation had taken, and the unexpected nature of the disclosures which Mr. Manners had made, were indeed surprises for which Mark Inglefield could not possibly have been prepared. He had entered the house in a condition of mind which may be designated beatific. All his plans had prospered, and he had expected to hear from Mr. Manners a thoroughly satisfactory account of the interview between his patron and Mr. Hollingworth. The celebration of the contemplated union with Miss Hollingworth would have been the crowning triumph of all his scheming. From the day when he first instilled into Mr. Manners'

ears the poisoned insinuations which were to effect the separation of father and son, success had attended him. Wary, cunning, and most painstaking in the early years of his association with Mr. Manners, he believed that he had so firmly established his position that there was no possibility of his being shaken from it. Gradually he had allowed himself to be lulled into a state of perfect security—to such an extent, indeed, that he no longer took pains to make himself more than ordinarily agreeable to the man upon whose word his future prospects depended. But now, in this startling manner, and at this unexpected time, the storm he had not foreseen burst upon him. He did not pause to consider that the Nemesis which threatened him was the outcome of his own evil, and that it sometimes happens that wrong-doers themselves forge bolts which destroy them. The idea of anything like justice or Providence did not occur to him. He was

angry, but his conscience was not disturbed. His inherent and perfect selfishness led him straight to one incontrovertible view of the difficulty in which he found himself. He had enemies who, nettled and wroth at his approaching triumph, had suddenly banded themselves together for the purpose of trampling him in the dust. It was, therefore, a battle to the death between him and them, and recognising that this was the supreme moment in his career, he determined to stop at nothing which would avert defeat. In the heart of this determination there lurked a ruthlessness of spirit which would lead him to any extreme of crime and duplicity. For the unhappy girl whom he had brought to shame and ruin he felt not one spark of compassion ; his own safety was his only consideration. As for Kingsley and Nansie, if a wish of his could have destroyed them, it would have been breathed without compunction.

Between Mr. Manners' last words and his response there was not a moment's pause. Swift as lightning's flash his resolution was formed.

"I scarcely know, sir," he said, "how to convince you that I have no other desire than to satisfy you. I can only repeat what I have endeavoured already to make clear, that you shall have plain and honest answers to everything you ask of me. But for all that, you must make some allowance for my natural feelings of surprise and indignation, that, after all these years, I find my integrity and honour doubted, and matters suddenly and strangely revived which I thought were settled long ago."

"I will make every reasonable allowance," said Mr. Manners. "At present, so far as you are concerned, I am animated by no other spirit than that of being strictly just towards you — even though finding that through some mischance I have drifted into

error, I shall be compelled to deprive him who is nearest to my blood of the chief portion of his patrimony. I am ready to take upon myself the whole of the blame ; but I must be satisfied that I have not been wilfully deceived."

"Deceived by whom, sir ? By me ?"

"By you," replied Mr. Manners, calmly. "You were the first to impart to me information concerning the lady my son Kingsley married. Your reports aggravated the feelings I entertained towards her because of the disappointment I experienced by my son marrying without my consent and approval. No other person spoke to me of her but yourself, nor did I seek information elsewhere. You cannot fail to remember the nature of the charges you brought against her."

"That is asking me a great deal," said Inglefield. "Do you expect me to remember faithfully every trifling detail of circumstances

which I have not thought of for a long number of years ?”

“I do not,” said Mr. Manners, observing with displeasure that Mark Inglefield continued to fence with the most important issues of the conversation ; “ but the principal of them cannot have escaped your memory.”

“ Being, as it seems to me, upon my trial——” said Inglefield, and paused, for the purpose of ascertaining whether this statement was in consonance with Mr. Manners’ intention.

Mr. Manners nodded, and said :

“ Yes, Inglefield. You may consider that to some extent you are upon your trial.”

“ That being the case, sir, it strikes me that you have already formed a judgment, without hearing what I may have to say.”

“ I should be sorry to think so. Tell me in what way you suppose I have done this.”

"You speak of the person your son married as a lady."

"Well?"

"That is not how I should describe her."

"Your remark tallies with what you said against her many years ago. But I shall continue to speak of her and to regard her as a lady until I have evidence to the contrary."

"Have you seen her, then, lately," asked Inglefield, "as well as the scoundrel who has brought these monstrous charges against me?"

"You are overtaxing my patience, Inglefield," said Mr. Manners. "You assert that you are anxious to satisfy me upon certain points which I consider vital, and yet you take advantage of any slight word or remark which offers the opportunity of evasion. If this opinion is unpalatable to you, thank yourself for it. I have seen the lady of whom we are speaking but once in my life,

and on the occasion she visited me I was surprised at the impression she produced upon me. I expected to see a woman whose appearance would have justified the opinion I had formed of her through your statements. I saw, on the contrary, a lady of gentle manners, a lady of culture and refinement, who received with dignity and respect the reproachful words I addressed to her. She needed to be accomplished, indeed, in duplicity and artfulness to have so successfully simulated the air of modesty and gentleness which distinguished her."

"You are not versed in the ways of such women, sir," said Inglefield. "They can deceive the cleverest of men."

"Possibly. I am waiting to ascertain whether I have been so deceived. At present, everything is in her favour. You informed me that she was a vulgar, showy person whose appearance in good society would bring ridicule upon my son."

“That is the opinion I formed of her, sir, from more complete evidence than you are supplied with.”

“I understood that you were very well acquainted with her; intimately, I think, you said.”

“I knew her very well, sir.”

“Intimately? You told me so at the time.”

“Yes, sir, intimately,” replied Inglefield, inwardly cursing his patron’s faithful memory.

“I am glad to be corroborated; it shows that you are speaking frankly. You related to me a story of the arts she used to entangle you, of your seeing through them, and escaping. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“As she could not ensnare you, she turned to Kingsley, and got him into her toils. Correct me if I am wrong in my memory of these matters.”

“I cannot say you are wrong, sir, but I will not pledge myself to the precise words you are using.”

“I do not ask you to do so. So long as we are agreed upon the general view I shall be satisfied. For my own part, I may say, Inglefield, that I am quite certain I am putting it fairly. Most distinctly did you call her an adventuress.”

“Was she not one, sir, in entangling your son because he had a wealthy father?”

“If that was her motive, yes, she was an adventuress; but it scarcely accords with the character of an adventuress that she should be content with making but one appeal to the man upon whose money she had designs.”

“You have a very positive and decided manner, sir, from which she might naturally infer that further attempts would be useless.”

“I cannot agree with you. Such a

woman as you described would not so easily relinquish her designs. It was all she had to depend upon. Failing success, a life of poverty was before her. She certainly would have tried again."

"Surely you would not make me accountable for her actions, sir?"

"No; I am simply arguing the question logically—not as regards you, but as regards her. At the time she made her modest appeal my judgment was clouded with passion; it is now clear, and the course I took does not commend itself to me. Her uncle also made an appeal to me—only one. He had fallen into sudden misfortune; on the day before he came to me he had been burnt out, and was not insured."

"A trumped-up story, I have no doubt, sir."

"Not so. A true story, as I saw in the papers afterwards. Neither in his manners was there anything vulgar or objectionable.

Although a poor man, he was well educated, and spoke with discretion and intelligence. Had he appealed to me for a large sum of money I might have had reasonable grounds for suspicion; but all he asked for was either five or ten pounds, and that was to send to my son, who was in a state of poverty abroad. I declare," said Mr. Manners, rising, and pacing the room in agitation, "now that I am opening my mind upon these matters, now that I hear myself speaking of them, I cannot justify my conduct. It was monstrous, monstrous. Had I given them a thousand times as much as they asked for I should not have missed it. My heart must have been made of stone!"

"Do not distress yourself, sir," said Inglefield, with a fawning attempt at sympathy. "You could not have acted otherwise."

"I could. I could have acted both justly

and mercifully, and so have lightened their lot. I drove the uncle away from the house, and he, too, never made another appeal to me. Their conduct from first to last was dignified and independent; mine was dastardly. You see how little disposed I am to spare myself. Let us put an end to this conversation; I am afraid to trust myself further."

Mark Inglefield was too discreet to offer any opposition, and too glad to escape to put into operation the plans he had formed. With a gentle "Good night, sir," he was about to leave the room, when Mr. Manners said :

"Do not forget that we have to inquire into the treacherous story related to me by Mr. Parkinson. You will be ready to accompany me at eleven o'clock in the morning."

"I shall be quite ready," said Mark Inglefield. And thus the interview terminated.

CHAPTER X.

BEING alone in his room Mark Inglefield set to work at once. The first thing he did was to write a letter, which he addressed to Mary Parkinson. The purport of this letter was that difficulties which had stood in his way were fortunately removed, and that he was now in a position, or would be in a very short time, to fulfil the promise he had made to her. This promise was that he would marry her. Appearances, he said, had been against him, but he would explain all to her personally. The past had been sad, the future should be bright. She could trust him implicitly, and it was a proof of his anxiety to do what was right that he

asked her to leave her father's house the moment she received this letter. He was waiting for her, and would take her away at once to commence a new and better life. She must leave the house quietly and secretly, and no one must know of her movements. "In a little while," he wrote, "when you are my wife, we will either send for your father, or you shall go to him and bring him to the home I shall prepare for you. Do not delay ; there is not a moment to lose. I have much to tell you, and I cannot rest till I see you." Having reached this point in his letter, he was about to add an instruction to bring this letter with her from her father's house ; but he did not write the words. "It might arouse her suspicions," he thought. "She is sure to bring the letter." He signed himself, "Your faithful lover and husband," and then paused again, doubting whether this would be sufficient without a name. He could not put his own,

for the reason that she was not acquainted with it. With the boldness of desperation he wrote the name he had assumed when he first introduced himself to her, "Richard Hollingworth," and thought as he did so what a fool he had been not to have assumed a name which was entirely false. But he had not then reckoned with the future, and had not dreamed that an exposure could ever occur. It was too late now to repent; with all these chances against him he had little doubt that he would ultimately triumph.

If he could succeed in conveying this letter to her to-night all would be well. Mary Parkinson would only be too glad to obey him, would only be too glad to fly into his arms. She had no one else in the world to depend upon but herself; her honour, her good name, her future happiness, were in his hands.

The letter finished, and placed in an

envelope, at the head of which he wrote: "Read this immediately. R. H.," he looked through his wardrobe, and selected a suit of clothes which would in some measure disguise him. These he put on, and then enveloped himself in an ulster which would render the disguise more complete. Carrying the letter in his hand, he stole stealthily out of the house, locking the door of his bedroom, and taking the key with him. He had provided himself with a latch-key, so that he could leave and enter the house without attracting attention.

"Safe so far," he muttered, when he found himself in the dark street. When he was at a safe distance he hailed a cab, and was driven to the east of the City, within a quarter of a mile of Mr. Parkinson's house. He was too cunning to drive nearer. Paying the cabman liberally, he strolled away with apparent carelessness. The next thing to be done was to convey the letter to Mary

Parkinson without any one but themselves being the wiser. A difficult undertaking at such an hour; he was not even sure of the house in which Mary lived. It was necessary, therefore, he decided regretfully, to obtain the assistance of a stranger. He arrived at the street in which Mr. Parkinson lived, and he looked about him. A policeman passed him, but he dared not seek the aid of a public officer. The policeman being out of sight, fortune favoured him. Wretched wayfarers who had no roof to cover them, and no money to pay for a bed, are not uncommon in these poor thoroughfares, and one approached him now and looked into his face. She was, alas! a young woman, scarcely twenty years of age. He accosted her without hesitation.

“Do you want to earn half-a-crown?” he asked.

She laughed hysterically, and held out her hand. He put sixpence into it, saying:

“The other two shillings if you can tell me what I want to know.”

“Right you are,” she said, recklessly; “fire away.”

“Are you acquainted with this neighbourhood?” he said.

“What game are you up to?” she cried.

“Never mind my game,” he said, “but answer my questions. Do you know these streets?”

“Do I know ’em? Why, I was born in ’em!”

“In which one?”

“In this; and wish I hadn’t been.”

“Never mind that. You know the people who live in these houses, then?”

“Know ’em? By heart! And they know me—rather! Ask any of ’em what they think of Blooming Bess.”

“Can you keep a secret?”

“Make it worth my while.”

“Will a crown be worth your while?”

“Depends.”

“You shall have a crown, and if you hold your tongue, in a fortnight I’ll come and find you and give you another crown. I suppose you’ll be hereabouts.”

“Unless I’m in gaol, or dead! I don’t much care which.”

“It isn’t much of a secret, only don’t talk about it to any one. You know this street, you say, and everybody in it. Just walk along with me, and tell me who lives in the houses.”

“That’s a lot to make a fuss about,” said the wretched girl, and walked past the houses in his company, and said, here lives such and such an one, here lives so-and-so, here’s a dozen of ’em living together, and so on, and so on. Now and again, to put her off the scent, Mark Inglefield asked questions concerning strangers, as to their trade, families, and other particulars. At

length she came to Mr. Parkinson's house, and said .

"Here lives old Parkinson."

"And who is he?"

"Oh, one of us," replied the girl.

"One of us!"

"Leastways, no better than the others. No more is his gal. I'm as good as she is, any day."

"His daughter, do you mean?"

"Yes. Stuck up, she used to be. Not stuck up now, not a bit of it. That's her room, on the first floor, with a light in it. Afraid to go to bed in the dark. A nice lot she is!"

Mark Inglefield, having ascertained what he wanted, marked the number of the house, and congratulated himself on the lighted candle. Then he walked to the end of the street, listening to the account the girl gave of the residents, and when he came to the end of it he handed her four-and-

sixpence, and said that was all he wanted to know.

“You’re a rum ’un,” said the girl. She had enough to pay for a bit of supper and a miserable bed. Late as it was, she knew where to obtain them.

All was silent and dark as Mark Inglefield wended his way back to Mr. Parkinson’s house. Making sure that he was alone, he stepped back and threw a small stone at the window. Mary Parkinson was awake, for he had but to throw another before the sash of the window was raised, and the girl looked out.

“Who’s there?” she asked.

“Hush!” said Mark Inglefield. “Read this.”

He had the letter ready, with a stone attached to it, and he threw it skilfully almost into her hand. The girl retreated into her room, and Mark Inglefield waited. He had purposely disguised his voice, fearing that in

the excitement of recognising it, Mary might have screamed out and alarmed the house. He had not long to wait. He heard the key being softly turned in the street door, and the next moment Mary Parkinson was by his side.

“ Oh, Richard ! ” she cried ; “ is it you—is it you ? ”

“ Yes,” he said, hurriedly. “ Don’t make a fool of yourself. No, no, I don’t mean that ; I mean, speak low. You’re a good girl ; you’ve got your hat on ; now, let us get out of this. You thought I was going to leave you in the lurch. See, now, how you were mistaken in me. I will explain all as we go. I couldn’t help acting as I did. My whole future and yours, Mary, depended on it. But everything is right now, and you will not have any reason to complain of me again. It did look bad, I admit ; but all your trouble is over now.”

He was hurrying her away as he spoke,

and already they were at some distance from her father's house.

"Oh, Richard, Richard, it is all so sudden!" sighed the girl. "I have been so unhappy—so unhappy!"

"Yes, yes," he said, interrupting her, having no desire to encourage her to talk, "but you are happy now, and everything will be well. You read my letter, didn't you? All that I wrote in it is true. Ah, here's a cab. Get in."

"Shall we never part again, Richard?" asked Mary, trembling so in the sudden happiness of this adventure that he had to support her into the cab.

"Never again, Mary, never again. Never mistrust me again."

"I won't, I won't!" said the girl, and burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

Mark Inglefield gave an instruction to the driver, and they rattled along at a great pace through the City.

CHAPTER XI.

AT eleven o'clock punctually the next morning, Mark Inglefield knocked at the door of Mr. Manners' study. They were not in the habit of taking their meals together; this was the reason of their not meeting at the breakfast-table.

"Good morning, sir," said Inglefield.

"Good morning," said Mr. Manners.

Mark Inglefield was cheerful and composed, and Mr. Manners, gazing at him, could not help thinking that he must be mistaken in suspecting him of wrong-doing.

"Shall we start at once, sir?"

"At once."

"I have been thinking," said Mark Ingle-

field, "of what took place last night, and I almost fear that I laid myself open to misconstruction."

"In what way?"

"By my manner. I was nervous and agitated, and I am afraid I expressed myself badly. It was not quite unnatural. The shock of finding myself charged with a crime so vile was great. Stronger men than I would have been unnerved. Indeed, sir, I could bear anything except the loss of your esteem."

"It will soon be put to the proof, Inglefield."

"Yes, sir, and I am truly glad that I shall be brought face to face with my accusers. When the poor girl who has been wronged sees me you will be immediately undeceived. Let us go, sir."

"This," thought Mr. Manners, "is innocence; I have done Inglefield an injustice." His manner insensibly softened towards the

schemer who up till now had so successfully plotted ; but this more lenient mood was attributable only to his stern sense of justice. It was this which induced him to say aloud : “ Inglefield, you gathered from what I said last night that it is not unlikely I may take steps to reconcile myself with my son and his wife.”

If Mark Inglefield had dared he would have denied that he had gathered any such impression, but so much now depended upon his keeping his patron in a good humour with him that he merely said : “ Yes, sir,” and waited for further developments.

“ Should this take place,” continued Mr. Manners, “ we shall both have to confess ourselves in the wrong. Your mistake may have been only an error of judgment ; mine was much more serious ; but that is a matter with which you have nothing to do. If Kingsley is willing, I should wish you and he to be friends.”

“I am ready to do anything,” said Inglefield, “to please you. But may I venture to say something?”

“Say whatever is in your mind, Inglefield.”

“Nothing, believe me, sir, could be farther from my desire than that you should find yourself unable to carry out your wishes. No effort shall be wanting on my part to bring happiness to you, quite independent of any reflection that may be cast upon my truthfulness and single-mindedness in what I unhappily was compelled to take part in many years ago. I waive all selfish considerations. I feel that I am expressing myself lamely, but perhaps you understand me.”

“Yes, and I appreciate your delicate position. Go on.”

“Having, then, made this clear to you, having as it were consented to have a false light thrown upon my actions, you cannot

doubt my sincerity when I say that you have my warmest wishes towards the success of what you desire. But this is what I wish to say, and I beg you will not misconstrue me. The new impressions you received were gained from this Mr. Parkinson, whom you so unexpectedly met at Mr. Hollingworth's house last night."

"Yes."

"Heaven forbid that I should step between father and son! The duty that I once felt devolved upon me was a most painful one, but I did it fearlessly, in the hope that the disclosures it was unhappily in my power to make might have been the means of assisting you to the accomplishment of your wishes with respect to your son. As I did my duty then, fearless of consequences, so must I do it now."

"Well, Inglefield?"

"I repeat, sir, that the new impressions you gained were gained from statements

made by Mr. Parkinson. I have no hesitation—you must pardon me for being so frank—in declaring him to be a slanderer. I have no key to the mystery of the plot which, in the hands of a man lest just than yourself, would almost surely have been my ruin, and I should be wanting in respect to myself were I not indignant at the monstrous charge of which it seems I stand accused, and of which I am now going with you to clear myself. That will be a simple matter, and I will pass it by. But, sir, if it is proved that Mr. Parkinson is wrong in my case, if it is proved that for some purpose of his own, and perhaps of others, he has invented an abominable story, and committed himself to abominable statements, may he not also be wrong in the statements he has made respecting persons whom, out of consideration for you, I will not name ?”

“You refer to my son and his wife,” said Mr. Manners. Inglefield was silent. “I can

cast no blame upon you, Inglefield. I can only repeat that everything shall be put to the proof."

With this remark, Inglefield was fain to be satisfied; but he inwardly congratulated himself that he had done something to throw doubt upon Mr. Parkinson's eulogies of Kingsley and Nansie.

They did not walk all the way to the east of London, but, as Mark Inglefield had done but a few short hours ago, they rode to within a quarter of a mile of Mr. Parkinson's residence, to which they then proceeded on foot. As they drew near they became aware that the neighbourhood was abnormally excited. It was past twelve o'clock when they reached the street in which Mr. Parkinson resided, and this was the dinner hour of a great many of the working men and women roundabout. The majority of these were standing in groups, talking excitedly of an event in which it was evident

they were hugely interested. Mark Inglefield guessed what it was, but Mr. Manners had no clue to it. He inquired his way to Mr. Parkinson's house, and, at the moment he reached it, was confronted by Mr. Parkinson himself.

The man was in a violent state of agitation. His limbs were trembling, his features were convulsed with passion, and he gazed upon Mr. Manners without recognising him.

"I have come," said Mr. Manners, "in accordance with my promise——"

"What promise?" cried Mr. Parkinson. "I want my daughter—my daughter!"

"It is about her I have come," said Mr. Manners, in great wonder.

"What of her?" cried Mr. Parkinson. "You have come about her? Well, where is she—where is she? But let her be careful, or I may be tempted to lay her dead at my feet!"

"I do not understand you. Do you not

remember what you and I said to each other last night? I said I would see you righted. I said I would bring the man whom you accused."

"I remember, I remember," interrupted Mr. Parkinson, in a voice harsh with passion. "You made fair promises, as others have made before you! But what does it matter now? My daughter is gone—gone! Run away in the night, like a thief! She may be in the river. Better for her, a great deal better for her! Stop! Who are you?" He advanced to Mark Inglefield, and, laying his trembling hands upon him, peered into his face. "I know you, you black-hearted scoundrel! You are the man whose picture I found in my daughter's box. Give me my daughter—give me my Mary!"

Mark Inglefield shook him off, but with difficulty, and the man stood glaring at him. Already a crowd had gathered around them; the words, "black-hearted scoundrel," caused

them to cast angry glances at Mark Inglefield. Mr. Manners looked in astonishment at one and another, utterly unable to comprehend the situation.

“The man is mad,” said Mark Inglefield.

“Yes, I am mad,” cried Mr. Parkinson, striving to escape from those who held him back from springing upon Mark Inglefield, “and therefore dangerous. What! Is a man’s home to be broken up, is he to be robbed of his only child, and disgraced, and is he to stand idly by when the scoundrel is before him who has worked this ruin upon him? As Heaven is my judge, I will have my revenge!”

“Come, come,” said a working man, “this violence will do no good, Parkinson. Be reasonable.”

“If violence will do no good,” retorted Mr. Parkinson, still struggling, “what will?”

“The truth,” replied the working man who had interposed.

“Ah, yes, the truth,” said Mr. Parkinson ;
“and when that is told, let us have justice !”

“Spoken like a man,” murmured some in the crowd.

“But what kind of justice ?” demanded Mr. Parkinson. “A cold-blooded law court, with cold-blooded lawyers arguing this way and that, while those who have been brought to ruin and shame sit down with their wasted lives before them ? No—not that kind of justice for me ! I will have the life of the man who has cast this upon me ! And that”—pointing with furious hand towards Mark Inglefield—“that is the monster I will have *my* justice upon, without appeal to lawyers !”

“I give you my word of honour,” said Mark Inglefield, appealing to those by whom he was surrounded, and who hemmed him and Mr. Manners in, determined that they should not escape, “I give you my word of honour that I have not the least idea what

this man means? I do not know him, nor any person belonging to him."

"You lie!" cried Mr. Parkinson.

"I speak the truth," said Mark Inglefield, perfectly calm. "This gentleman who has accompanied me here will testify to it. If I did not suspect that this man is not accountable for his words, I would not remain here another moment."

"But you must," said a friend of Mr. Parkinson; and, "Yes, you must, you must!" proceeded from others in the throng.

"I will," said Mark Inglefield, "because I have come here for the express purpose of unmasking a foul plot——"

"Rightly put," shouted Mr. Parkinson. "A foul plot—a foul plot! And it shall be unmasked, and the guilty shall suffer—not the innocent! For, after all, mates,"—and now he, in his turn, appealed to the crowd — "what blame lies at the door of a weak, foolish girl, who is led to her ruin

by the lying, plausible words of gentlemen like these ? ”

But here the unreasoning torrent of his wrath was stemmed by many of his comrades, who said :

“None of that, Parkinson. It won’t help you, and it won’t help us. The gentleman speaks fair. He says he has come here to unmask a foul plot.”

“That is my intention, and the intention of my friend here,” said Mark Inglefield, “and as you say, it will not help him or any of us to be violent and abusive. Why, does it not stand to reason that we could have kept away if we had chosen ? Does it not prove, coming here of our own accord as we have done, that we are of the same mind as yourselves ? ”

“Yes,” replied one, struck, as others were, with this plain reasoning, “let us hear what this gentleman has to say.”

“It is not for me,” said Mark Inglefield,

who, although he had won the suffrages of his audience, was not disposed to be too communicative, "to pry into any man's family affairs, but when he makes them public property and brings false accusations against the innocent, he is not justified in grumbling if he is hauled over the coals. My friend here was compelled last night to listen to charges which seemed to him to implicate me in some trouble into which Mr. Parkinson has fallen."

"How do you come ^Tto know his name?" inquired a man.

"He gave it last night to this gentleman, who communicated it to me. Besides, it has been mentioned half-a-dozen times by yourselves. The charges I referred to coming to my ears, it was arranged ^Ibetween my friend and myself that we should present ourselves here this morning for the ^Tpurpose of confuting them. I suppose you don't expect anything fairer than that?"

“Nothing could be fairer.”

“I am sorry to learn,” continued Mark Inglefield, “that this man has been wronged, and sorry to learn that trouble has come to him through his daughter. They are both entire strangers to me. What I ask is that he bring his daughter forward now to corroborate my statement that she and I never saw each other in all our lives.”

“But that,” said one of Mr. Parkinson’s friends, “is just what he can’t do. His daughter has strangely disappeared in the night.”

Mark Inglefield turned towards Mr. Manners, with a smile of incredulity on his lips.

“Our errand here seems to be wasted. Let me speak to you a moment out of hearing of these people.”

The working men moved aside to allow the two gentlemen to pass, and when they were a little apart, Mark Inglefield said :

"I hope you are satisfied, sir."

"So far as you are concerned," replied Mr. Manners, "I cannot help being. But there is something still at the bottom of this that I would give much to get at the truth of."

"Why, sir," said Mark Inglefield, scornfully, "can you not see that the whole affair is trumped up?"

"No, I cannot see that. These men were not aware that we were coming here this morning, and even if they were it is not likely that they would have got up this excitement for our especial benefit."

Mark Inglefield bit his lip.

"I am not quite right, perhaps, in saying that the whole affair is trumped up, but undoubtedly it is much exaggerated, and more importance is being attached to it than it deserves. You must not mind my saying that I cannot form the same opinion of Mr. Parkinson as yourself. It seems to me that

he is desirous of making capital out of his calamity. I have done all I could, have I not, to clear myself of the charge?"

"I do not see that you could have done more."

"There is nothing more to stop for, then. Shall we go?"

"Not yet. You may, if you wish, but I shall remain to make inquiries."

"I will remain with you, sir, of course. It would not be safe to leave you alone in such a neighbourhood as this."

"It would be quite safe. You forget that it was in just such neighbourhoods I passed my young days. I know them better than you appear to do, Inglefield. The people we see about us are respectable members of society—quite as respectable as ourselves. As to remaining, please yourself. I do not feel at all out of place in such society."

"Nor do I, sir," said Mark Inglefield, with a frank smile. "It is only my

anxiety for you that made me say what I did."

"There is another matter which you seem to have forgotten. It is in this neighbourhood that my son and his wife and daughter live. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Parkinson wishes to say something to us."

During this colloquy Mr. Parkinson had calmed himself greatly, and now, followed by his friends, approached the gentlemen.

"I should like to ask you a question or two," he said, addressing himself to Mark Inglefield, "if you have no objection."

"Of course I have no objection," said Mark Inglefield. "I will do whatever I can to help you; only come to the point."

"I'll do so, sir. Your visit here, on the face of it, seems fair and above-board. What I want to know first is, how it happens that my daughter had a portrait of yours in her possession?"

"My dear sir," replied Mark Inglefield,

blandly, "you are putting a conundrum to me."

"You don't know how she got hold of it, sir?"

"I haven't the remotest notion."

"How comes it that, when I taxed her with it, she confessed that it was the portrait of the scoundrel who had brought her shame upon her?"

At this question all eyes were directed towards Mark Inglefield. Nothing daunted, he said:

"That is a question it is impossible for me to answer. She must, of course, have had some motive in giving utterance to so direct a falsehood. My only regret is that she is not here to tell you herself that we are complete strangers to each other. Has your daughter always told you the truth? Has she never deceived you?" Mr. Parkinson winced; these questions struck home. "Why, then," continued Mark Inglefield,

perceiving his advantage, "should she not have deceived you in this instance? Perhaps she wishes to screen the man against whom you are justly angered; perhaps she still has a sneaking fondness for him, and protects him by throwing the blame upon a stranger."

"I don't dispute," said Mr. Parkinson, "that you may be right. But are you public property?"

"I fail to understand you."

"Are you a public man, sir?"

"Thank Heaven, no. I am a private gentleman."

"Your portraits are not put in the shop windows for sale?"

"No."

"Then what I want to know is," said Mr. Parkinson, doggedly sticking to his point, "how your portrait fell into her hands."

"And that, I repeat," said Mark Inglefield,

impatiently, "is exactly what I am unable to tell you."

"She couldn't have bought it. She must have had it given to her by some one."

"Well?"

"Whoever gave it to her must know you, and you must know him."

A murmur of approval ran through the throng. Nothing better pleases such an audience, as was now assembled, than an argument logically worked out.

"That does not follow," disputed Mark Inglefield, annoyed at Mr. Parkinson's pertinacity, but seeing no way to avoid it without incurring the risk of reviving Mr. Manners' suspicions.

"That's where the chances are, at all events," said Mr. Parkinson. "You see, sir, that you can't help being dragged into this bad business."

"And if I decline to be dragged into it?"

“It is what very few men would do, sir. I should say—and I think most of those round us will agree with me—that you are bound to do all you can to assist me in discovering the scoundrel who would ruin you as well as me.”

Mr. Manners looked straight at Mark Inglefield. Mr. Parkinson’s view tallied with that which he had expressed to Inglefield in their interview.

“I will do what I can,” he said, “but I really am at a loss how to take even the first step.”

“Thank you for saying so much, sir. We are all at a loss, but I don’t intend to rest till I discover the scoundrel. You’ll not object to giving me your name and address.”

“What for?” demanded Mark Inglefield, wishing that the earth would open and swallow up his tormentor.

“Give it to him,” said Mr. Manners, quietly.

Thus forced to comply, Mark Inglefield, with a show of alacrity, handed Mr. Parkinson his card.

"I am obliged to you, sir," said Mr. Parkinson.

A possible road of escape presented itself to Mark Inglefield.

"Who saw this portrait?" he asked.

"No one in this neighbourhood," replied Mr. Parkinson, "that I know of, except me and my daughter."

"It may not be my portrait, after all," suggested Mark Inglefield.

"There isn't a shadow of doubt, sir," said Mr. Parkinson, "that it *is* a picture of you. I'm ready to swear to it."

It was at this precise moment that there occurred to Mark Inglefield a contingency which filled him with apprehension. From what Mr. Manners had told him, Kingsley's wife had befriended Mary Parkinson, and was doubtless in the confidence of the poor

girl. Suppose Mary had shown his portrait to Nansie, would she have recognised it? It was long since he and Nansie had met, and time had altered his appearance somewhat, but not sufficiently to disguise his identity. He did not betray his uneasiness, but a new feature was now introduced that caused him to turn hot and cold. This was the unwelcome and unexpected appearance of Blooming Bess upon the scene.

CHAPTER XII.

THE wretched girl did not come alone. A woman dragged her forward.

“Here you are, Mr. Parkinson,” said the woman. “Blooming Bess can tell you something about Mary’s disappearance last night.”

“I am ruined,” thought Mark Inglefield, and hoped that Blooming Bess would not recognise him. There were chances in his favour. It was night when they met, and he had taken the precaution to change his clothes and wrap himself in an ulster. To these chances he was compelled to trust; and perhaps he could keep himself out of the girl’s sight.

“What do you know about it?” asked Mr. Parkinson in great excitement.

“Oh, I don’t mind telling,” said the girl. “Here, you! Just let go of me, will you?”

She released herself from the woman’s grasp.

“Do you want the lot,” she asked of Mr. Parkinson, “from beginning to end?”

“I must know everything,” he replied, “everything.”

“You must, must you? Well, that’s for me to say, not you. I could tell you a lot of lies if I wanted to.”

He made a threatening motion towards her, but was held back by his mates. “You’ll only make things worse,” they said.

“A precious sight worse,” said Blooming Bess, with a reckless laugh. “Oh, let him get at me if he likes! Who cares? I don’t. But I’ll tell him what he wants, never fear. She’s a respectable one, she is! When I went to the bad, passed me by as if I was so much

dirt. Wouldn't look at me—wouldn't speak to me; holding her frock like this, for fear I should touch it. And now what is she, I'd like to know? Better than me—or worse?"

Mr. Parkinson groaned.

"Groan away; much good it'll do you. It won't bring her back; and if it did, who'd look at her? Not me. She's come down, with all her stuck-up pride. I'm as good as her, any day of the week!"

"Come, come, Bess," said a man in the crowd, "you're not a bad sort; let us have the truth, like a good girl."

"Oh, yes, I'm a real good 'un now you want to get something out of me! But never mind; here goes. It was in the middle of the night, and I didn't have a brass farthing in my pockets. They turned me out because I couldn't pay for my bed. It wasn't the first time, and won't be the last. So out I goes, and here I am in the middle of this

very street, when a swell comes up to me, and says, says he : ‘Do you want to earn half a bull?’ I laughs, and holds out my hand, and he puts sixpence in it, and says, says he : ‘The other two bob when you tell me what I want to know.’”

“Are you making this up out of your head, Bess?”

“Not me ! not clever enough. Never was one of the clever ones, or I’d be a jolly sight better off. Then the swell asks me if I can tell him the names of the people that lives in the street, and plump upon that asks me if I can keep a secret. I thought he was kidding me, I give you my word, and I says : ‘Make it worth my while.’ With that he promises me five bob, and I walks with him, or he walks with me—it don’t matter which, does it?—from one end of the street to the other, and I tell him everybody that lives in it. ‘Who lives here?’ says he, and ‘Who lives here?’ says he ; and thinks I, this is a rum game ;

wonder what he's up to! But it ain't my business, is it? My business is to earn five bob, and earn it easy; and when I have told him all he wanted, he gives me four bob and a bender, and sends me off. What can you make of all that?"

"Not much," said the man who had taken her in hand. Mr. Parkinson could not trust himself to speak, and Mark Inglefield did not dare. "What time was it when this occurred?"

"By my gold watch," replied the girl, with a fine sarcasm, "it was half-past the middle of the night. Perhaps a minute or two more. I like to be particular."

"And that is all you know? You can't tell us anything more?"

"Oh, I didn't say that, did I? All? Not a bit of it. Why, the cream's to come. It's only skim milk you've got as yet."

"Let's hear the end of it, Bess," said the man, coaxingly.

“That’s the way to speak to me. Be soft, and you can do what you like with me ; be hard, and to save your life I wouldn’t speak a word. The end of it was this. The swell had done with me, and thought I had done with him. Never more mistaken in his life. I was born curious, I was ; so thinks I to myself, ‘ I’m blowed if I don’t see what he’s up to ; ’ and when I turned the corner of the street and he thought I was gone for good, I come back, and there I was, you know, standing in the dark, out of sight. He walks back to the middle of the street, and stops right before this house, and looks up at Mary’s—I beg her pardon, at Miss Parkinson’s window. There’s a light burning there, you know. He’s got a letter in his hand, and what does he do but pick up a stone and tie them together. Then he picks up another stone, and throws it at Mary’s window, and it opens and she looks out. I’m too far off to hear what they say to each

other ; but I suppose he says, ‘ Catch,’ as he throws the letter up, and catch she does. And would you believe it? A little while afterwards down she comes and takes his arm as natural as life, and off they go together. I follow at a distance ; I didn’t want my neck twisted, and he looked the sort of cove that wouldn’t mind doing it, so I keep at a safe distance, till he calls a growler, and in they get and drive away. And that’s the end of it.”

“ It’s a true story,” said Mr. Parkinson. “ When I went into her bedroom this morning, her window was open.”

Those who had heard it gathered into groups, and discussed its various points ; some suggesting that it looked as if the police were mixed up in it ; others favouring Mark Inglefield’s view that Mary Parkinson’s statements to her father were false, from first to last. Meanwhile Mark Inglefield and Mr. Manners were left to themselves,

the younger man congratulating himself that he had escaped being seen by Blooming Bess. His great anxiety now was to get away as quickly as possible, and, at the risk of offending Mr. Manners, he would have chosen the lesser evil, and have made an excuse for leaving him, had it not been that he was prevented by Blooming Bess, whose aimless footsteps had led her straight to Mark Inglefield, before whom she now stood. She gazed at him, and he at her. Her look was bold, saucy, reckless; his was apprehensive; but knowing, if she exposed him, that there was no alternative for him but to brazen it out, he did not decline the challenge expressed in her eyes. She said nothing, however, but slightly turned her head, and laughed. As she turned she was accosted by Mr. Parkinson, who had joined this group.

“Did you see the man?” asked Mr. Parkinson.

“Did I see him !” she exclaimed. “Yes ; though it was the middle of the night, and dark, I saw him as plain as I see you. Why, I could pick him out among a thousand.”

But to Mark Inglefield’s infinite relief, she made no movement towards him ; she merely looked at him again and laughed.

“Describe him,” said Mr. Parkinson, roughly. “It may be a laughing matter to you, but it is not to us.”

“To us !” retorted the girl. “What have these gentlemen got to do with it ?”

“We are interested in it,” said Mr. Manners.

“Oh ! are you ? And are you interested in it too, sir ?” she asked, addressing Mark Inglefield.

“I am,” he replied, finding himself compelled to speak.

“That’s funny. You’re the sort of gentleman, I should say, that would pay well for anything that was done for him.”

"I am," said Mark Inglefield, growing bold; her words seemed to indicate a desire to establish a freemasonry between them, of which neither Mr. Parkinson nor Mr. Manners could have any suspicion.

"That's a good thing to know," said Blooming Bess, "because, you see, I should be an important witness—shouldn't I?"

"Very important," said Mr. Manners, "and I would pay well also."

"You would, would you, sir?" She looked from one man to the other.

"Allow me to manage this, sir," said Mark Inglefield. "It is more to my interest than yours."

Mr. Manners nodded acquiescence.

"I asked you to describe the man," said Mr. Parkinson.

"I can do that. He was short and fat, and his face was covered with hair. Oh, I can spot him the minute I see him."

Mark Inglefield gave the girl a smile of

encouragement and approval. The description she had given could not possibly apply to him. Every fresh danger that threatened vanished almost as soon as it appeared.

“There seems to be nothing more to stop for, sir,” he said to Mr. Manners; “with respect to this man’s daughter, we have learnt all that we are likely to hear. It occurs to me that you might prefer to carry out the second portion of your visit to this neighbourhood alone.”

“You refer to my son,” said Mr. Manners.

“Yes; and I might be an *incumbrance*. Whether justly or not—out of consideration for you I will not enter into that question—your son and his wife would not look upon me with favour if they were to see me suddenly; and the circumstance of my being in your company might be misconstrued. I am willing, sir, that the past should be buried; your simple wish that your son and I should become friends again is sufficient for me. I

will obey you, but a meeting between us should be led up to ; it will be more agreeable to both of us. Do you not think so ? ”

“ You are doubtless right, Inglefield,” said Mr. Manners. “ I appreciate your delicate thoughtfulness.”

“ Thank you, sir. There is another reason why I should leave you now. The story that girl has told may be true or false. You must not mind my expressing suspicion of everything in connection with Mr. Parkinson’s daughter. It is even possible that she and that girl may be in collusion for some purpose of their own, and that they have concocted what we have heard. I have cleared myself, I hope.”

“ It would be unjust to deny it,” said Mr. Manners.

“ But I shall not allow the matter to end here,” said Mark Inglefield, warmly. “ I shall put it at once in the hands of a detective, who will, I dare say, be able to ascertain

how far we have been imposed upon. The sooner the inquiry is opened up the stronger will be our chances of arriving at the truth. Do you approve of what I propose ? ”

“ It is the right course,” said Mr. Manners. “ I was about to propose it myself.”

“ I will go then at once. In simple justice to me, sir, if you see Mr. Hollingworth, you should tell him how cruelly I have been suspected.”

“ You shall be set right in his eyes, Inglefield. If I can find time to-day, I will make a point of paying him a visit.”

“ My mind is greatly relieved, sir. Good morning.”

“ Good morning, Inglefield.”

Mark Inglefield, without addressing a word to Mr. Parkinson, went his way. The conversation between him and Mr. Manners had been quite private. Before he left the street he looked to see if Blooming Bess was still there, but she had disappeared.

He did not proceed to the office of any detective. Slowly, and in deep thought, he walked towards the Mansion House ; the crowds of people hurrying apparently all ways at once disturbed and annoyed him ; it was impossible to think calmly in the midst of such noise and bustle. If ever there was a time in his life when he needed quiet and repose to think out the schemes which were stirring in his cunning mind, that time was now. The danger was averted for awhile, but he could not yet regard himself as safe. He had to reckon with Blooming Bess.

That she had recognised him was certain—as certain as that she had played into his hands, and put his enemies off the scent.

“I wonder,” he thought, “that she did not ask my name and address. What a misfortune that she should have presented herself when I was in the street !”

He was not aware that the girl of whom he was thinking was following him stealthily,

and had never for a moment lost sight of him.

He turned to the left, and reached the Embankment. It was quieter there. Blooming Bess followed him. There were few people about, and he strolled leisurely along, looking at the river. The principle of evil was strong within him. He belonged to that class of men who will hesitate at nothing that can be done with safety to protect themselves. He was not bold enough for deeds of violence; his nature was sufficiently ruthless, and he was not troubled with qualms of conscience; but his first consideration had ever been to keep himself on the safe side. In his methods he was sly, cunning, deceitful, treacherous; but physically he was a coward. He had, however, the greatest confidence in his resources. "I shall beat them all yet," he thought; and thought, too, what a stroke of fortune it would be if sudden death were to overtake those who stood in

his path. He had passed Waterloo Bridge when he felt a touch upon his arm. He looked down and saw Blooming Bess.

"Oh," he said, with no outward show of displeasure.

"Yes," she said, with a smile.

To strangers this simple interchange of greeting would have been enigmatical, but these two understood each other, though socially he stood so high and she so low.

"Have you been following me?" he asked.

"Of course I have," she replied. "Too good to miss. I'm in luck. I say, you *are* a gentleman, ain't you—a real swell?"

"I am a gentleman, I hope," he said, with perfect sincerity.

"I hope so too. You've got plenty of tin?"

"Very little."

"All right. I'll go off to the other one."

He caught her arm.

"Don't be a fool!"

"That's just what I ain't going to be. Well, you're a nice one, you are! Not even a thankee for standing by you as I did."

"You will not be content with thanks," he said, gloomily.

"Not likely. Want something more solid. Now, *didn't* I stand by you like a brick? Just one word from Blooming Bess, and your whole box of tricks would have been upset. But I didn't let on, by so much as a wink. We took 'em in nicely between us, didn't we? 'You're the sort of gentleman,' says I, 'that would pay well for anything that was done for him.' 'I am,' says you. I say, if they'd guessed the game we were playing there'd have been a rumpus. I want to know your name, and where you live."

"You don't," he retorted. "You want money."

"I want that, too ; but I want your name and address, and I mean to have it. I won't use it against you so long as you square me."

She spoke with so much determination that he gave her what she demanded.

"Mr. Parkinson knows the other one," she said ; "and if I don't find you at home when I want, I'll find him. Have you got a sovereign about you ?"

Surprised at the moderateness of the request, he gave her a sovereign.

"How's Mary ?" she asked.

The question suggested to him a plan which offered greater safety than allowing her to go away with money, and perhaps drinking herself into dangerous loquacity.

"Would you like to see her ?" he asked.

"I wouldn't mind," she replied.

"Come along with me, then," he said.

"I'll take you to her."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. MANNERS experienced a great sense of relief when Mark Inglefield had taken his departure. The presence of that person had hampered not only his movements, but his will. Now that he was alone, he felt himself absolutely free. He exchanged a few words with Mr. Parkinson, in which he expressed again his good intentions towards the distracted father, and he spoke also to two or three other of the working men, who, when he moved away from them, looked after him with marked favour. It chimed with his humour not to be known, and he was pleased that Mr. Parkinson had not made free with his name. The reminiscences attaching to

him, from a working man's point of view, would have caused him to be followed and gazed at with curiosity. The name of Manners was a name to conjure with; the great fortune he had made caused him to be regarded as a king among the class from which he sprang, and it was to his credit that he had amassed his wealth fairly, according to the conditions of things. Perhaps in the not far-off future these conditions will be changed, and it will be recognised that labour has a right to a larger proportion of its profits than at present falls to its lot. Meanwhile it may be noted that, despite the private wrong which lay at the door of Mr. Manners, and which he was happily stirred now to set right, despite the fact that in his business relations he had driven hard bargains, his public career was one of which he might be justly proud. Hard as were the bargains he had driven, he had not ground his workmen down; if they did a fair

day's work, they received a fair day's wage ; he had made no attempt to filch them of their just due. In contrast with many a hundred employers of labour, who grind the men and women they employ down to starvation point, Mr. Manners stood forth a shining example. As for his private affairs, they were his, and his alone, to settle. Whatever changes for the better may come over society in the coming years, the purely human aspect of life will never be altered. There will always be private wrongs and private injustices ; and although it is to be hoped that the general inequalities of mankind may be lessened, the frailties of our common nature will ever remain the same.

Mr. Manners strolled slowly through streets and narrow ways with which, in his youth, he had been familiar, and he derived a sad pleasure in renewing his acquaintance with the aspects of life which characterised them. He noted the changes which had

taken place. Here, a well-known street had disappeared; rows of private dwellings had been turned into shops; but for the main part, things were as they used to be. He searched for a certain house in which he had resided as a boy, and, finding it, gazed upon its old walls as he would have gazed upon the face of an old friend who had long since passed out of his life. He recalled himself as he had been in the past, a brisk, stirring, hard-working lad, taking pleasure in his work, eager to get along in the world, keen for chances of promotion, industriously looking about for means to improve himself. Between that time and the present was a bridge which memory re-created, and over that bridge he walked in pensive thought, animated by tenderer feelings than he had experienced for many, many years. Once more he felt an interest in the ways and doings of his fellow-men, and it seemed to him as if he had long been living a dead life. The crust of selfish-

ness in which he had been as it were entombed was melting away, and even in these humble thoroughfares the sun was shining more brightly for him. Such a simple thing as a geranium blooming in a pot on the window-sill of his old home, brought an unwonted moisture to his eyes. He knocked at the door, conversed with the woman who opened it, ascertained her position, listened to what she had to say about her children, wrote down their names, and left behind him some small tokens for them from one who once was as they were now.

“You shall hear from me again,” he said to the surprised woman; and as he left her he felt new channels of pleasure and sweetness were opening out to him. He was becoming human.

When he started with Mark Inglefield from his home in the west of the city, he had formed no plan as to the means by which he should approach Kingsley and Nansie; but

after some time spent in wandering among the thoroughfares and seeking old landmarks, he resolved not to present himself to them until evening. It would be a more favourable hour for what he purposed to do. Until then he could profitably employ himself in ascertaining how they stood in the neighbourhood, and whether Mr. Parkinson's report of them was correct. It was three o'clock in the afternoon before he felt the necessity of eating, and then he entered a common eating-house and sat down to a humble meal. It was strange how he enjoyed it, and how agreeable he felt this renewal of old associations. When he had finished, he took out his pocket-book and made some rough calculations. The poverty of the neighbourhood had impressed itself upon him, and he thought how much good the expenditure of money he could well spare would do for the children who were growing into men and women. He remembered the want of

rational enjoyment he had experienced occasionally in his boyhood. He had not then many spare hours ; but there had come upon him at odd times the need for social relaxation. There was only one means of satisfying this need—the public-house—and that way, as he knew, led to ruin. From what Mr. Parkinson had told him, Nansie was untiring in her efforts to ameliorate and smooth the hard lot of the wretched and poverty-stricken ; and, poor as she was, had succeeded in shedding light upon weary hearts. If, in her position, she could do so much, how vast was the field before him to do more !

He made his calculations, and was surprised to find, when the figures were before him, that he was richer than he had supposed himself to be. In former days he was in the habit of making such calculations ; but for a long while past he had not troubled himself about them—a proof how truly valueless his

great store of wealth was to him, and how scanty was the enjoyment he derived from it. Supposing that Mark Inglefield justified and cleared himself in this affair of Mary Parkinson — of which, notwithstanding all that had transpired, Mr. Manners was not yet completely satisfied—half of his fortune should go to the redeeming of his promises to that person in respect of the expectations held out to him. The remaining half would be ample for the carrying out of schemes as yet unformed, in the execution of which, if all went well, Kingsley and Nansie would assist him.

Issuing from the eating-house with a light step, he proceeded to make his inquiries respecting his son's family. What he heard made him even more humble and remorseful. Every person to whom he spoke had affectionate words for them; nothing but good was spoken of them. They were not only respected, but beloved.

“If you want to know more about them than I can tell you, sir,” said one poor woman to whom Nansie had been kind, “go to Dr. Perriera.”

Receiving Dr. Perriera’s address, Mr. Manners wended thither, and found the worthy doctor, who was now a man well advanced in years, in his shop. With Dr. Perriera he had a long and pregnant interview. In confidence he told the doctor who he was, and Dr. Perriera’s heart glowed at the better prospect which seemed to present itself to friends whom he honoured. Forces which had long lain dormant in Mr. Manners came into play; always a good judge of character, he recognised that he was conversing with a man of sterling worth and honour.

“I have been informed,” he said, “that you are a doctor of great skill. You would have succeeded in more flourishing neighbourhoods than this.”

“I preferred to stay here,” said Dr.

Perriera. "Elsewhere I should not have found the happiness I have enjoyed among these poor people."

"But you would have been rich."

"It would have marred my life," was the simple rejoinder. "You and I are on equal ground, about the same age, I judge. We have not many years to live. Of what use presently will much money be to you and me? Men and women grow into false ideas; most of those who become rich become slaves. Gold is their master—a frightful tyrant, destructive, as it is chiefly used, of all the teachings of Christianity. But then, Christians are scarce."

Mr. Manners hinted at his unformed schemes, and Dr. Perriera was greatly interested.

"What the poor and wretched want," he said, "is light, first for the body, afterwards for the soul. Not the light of gin-shops, which are poisonously planted by the wealthy

at every convenient corner. Sweep away the rookeries; purify the gutters; commence at the right end. There are darksome spaces round about, in which only vice and crime can grow; and they are allowed to remain, defiling and polluting body and soul. There is a false, convenient theory, that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament. My dear sir, you can. Cleanliness is next to godliness; that is a wiser saying; and Governments would be better employed in enforcing this than in ninety-nine out of every hundred of the Acts they waste their time in discussing."

"What do you mean," asked Mr. Manners, "by your remark, commence at the right end?"

"Commence with the children," replied Dr. Perriera, "not neglecting meanwhile those who are grown up. These children presently will become fathers and mothers, and their early teaching bears fruit. It is impossible

to train anew firmly-rooted trees, but they can be gently and wisely treated. With saplings it is different."

They remained in conversation until evening fell. Mr. Manners had received Kingsley's address, and the two men were standing at the door of the doctor's shop when an elderly man and a young girl passed. In the elderly man Mr. Manners recognised Mr. Loveday, Nansie's uncle, who had once paid him a visit in his grand mansion. But it was the girl who chiefly attracted him. Her sweet face, her gentle bearing, impressed him, but more than all was he impressed by a likeness which caused his heart to beat more quickly. It was a likeness to his son.

Dr. Perriera glanced at Mr. Manners, and called the girl, who, with her companion, paused to say a word or two.

"Is your mother well?" asked the doctor.

"Quite well, thank you," replied the girl.

"And your father?"

"Quite well."

"How is business, Mr. Loveday?"

"So-so," said the old book-man. "I can't compete very well with the youngsters. Their brazen voices beat me."

He said this quite good-humouredly.

"We must make way for the young," observed the doctor.

"Yes, yes; but the necessity of living is upon the old as well."

"Are you going home now?"

"Yes," said the girl, answering for her uncle. "We have been to see the new shop."

"Whose?"

"Timothy Chance's."

She laughed kindly as she spoke the name.

"See," said Mr. Loveday, opening a small

parcel he held in his hand, "we have been making a purchase there."

What he disclosed to view was half a cooked fowl. Dr. Perriera appeared to be greatly interested in this simple food.

"How much did you pay for it?"

"One and four."

"That is cheap. A fat fowl, too."

"Yes. The shop is crowded; people are buying like wildfire. Timothy will make a fortune."

"He has pretty well made one already. Sharp fellow, Timothy Chance, and a worthy fellow, too."

The girl nodded, and Mr. Loveday observed:

"He is just the same as ever. Not a bit altered. Never forgets old friends, and never will forget them. That come-by-chance waif is of the right mettle. He is with Nansie now. We are going to see him. Come along, Hester.'

“Can you guess who that young lady is?” asked Dr. Perriera of Mr. Manners.

“I am almost afraid to guess. Tell me.”

“Your grandchild. Have you never seen her before?”

“Never.”

“If I had a daughter,” said Dr. Perriera, “I should esteem it a great blessing if she were like Hester Manners. She has all the virtues of her mother, all the simplicity and nobility which distinguish her father. She has been trained in the right school. I regard it as an honour that I am privileged to call myself her friend. Do you wish to proceed at once to your son’s poor dwelling?”

“I would prefer to see him alone. This friend whom my grandchild spoke of is there; I will wait awhile.”

“It will be best, perhaps. My place is at your service. If it accords with your desire you can remain here, and I will bring your son to you.”

“I thank you,” said Mr. Manners, “and accept your kind offer.”

His heart was stirred by hopes and fears. It went out to the sweet girl he had seen for the first time; she was of his blood; but had he any claim to her affection? How would her parents receive him—her parents, to whom she was bound by the strongest links of love, and whom he had treated so harshly and unjustly? There was a time when he thought he could never bring himself to forgive the son who had disappointed his worldly hopes; but now it was he himself who needed forgiveness. The happiness of his brief future depended upon the son he had wronged; if Kingsley and Nansie rejected him, the anguish of a lonely, loveless life would attend him to his last hour.

“I should advise,” said Dr. Perriera, “that you wait awhile before the interview takes place. Timothy Chance and your son’s family are much attached to each other, and it

will be an act of delicacy not to immediately intrude upon them."

"An act of delicacy?" repeated Mr. Manners, looking at Dr. Perriera for an explanation.

"I have an idea," said the doctor, "that Timothy Chance has a tender feeling for your grandchild. Whether it is reciprocated or not, I cannot say. There is a disparity in their ages of fourteen or fifteen years, but that should be no obstacle. I hold that in married life the man should be some years older than the woman."

"You have hinted that this Timothy Chance is well-to-do."

"He is more than that. He is on the high road to a fortune. I am curious to see the shop he has opened. Will you come? We have time. On the road I will relate to you Timothy Chance's story. It is in its way remarkable."

They started out together, and, with a heart gloomed by the intrusion of this friend

of his son's family, Mr. Manners listened to the doctor's narrative. In Kingsley's eyes, his money had never been deemed of importance ; Kingsley had never stooped or cringed before that universal idol. How much less was he likely to do so now that he had by his side a friend who could lift him from the state of poverty to which the hard father had condemned him ? Not purse-strings, but heart-strings, would decide the issue of his heart's desire.

Up to the point with which we are familiar there is no need to set down here what Dr. Pereira imparted to his companion. We will take up the thread from the time of Timothy Chance's last appearance upon the scene.

“ Timothy has made the best use of his opportunities,” said the doctor. “ From the small beginnings which I have recounted he has risen by slow and sure steps to be, I should say, the largest poultry breeder in the kingdom. He has farms in half-a-dozen different places, and it is necessary, of course,

that at stated intervals he should get rid of old stock to make room for new. His contracts are really important ones, and he turns over a large amount of money during the year. Lately an idea occurred to him, which he is now turning to practical account. Instead of selling his old stock to hotels and shopkeepers, he believes it will be more profitable to speculate in it himself. As a trial, he has opened a shop in the neighbourhood here, which I regard as a boon to the people. He will send so many fowls there every day, and they will be cooked and disposed of to those who can afford to buy. I think his idea was inspired by something of a similar nature which he saw in France. You can purchase a whole roasted fowl, a half, a wing and breast, or a leg. The prices are very moderate, the poultry is of good quality, the cooking is sure to be excellent, for Timothy is perfect in all his arrangements. Here we are at his trial shop."

It was, indeed, a notable establishment,

and, as Hester had said, was crowded with customers. The predominating features of the shop were light and cleanliness. At the rear of the shop were the stoves at which the fowls were roasted, and these were cut up, or arranged whole, upon marble slabs. The attendants were all females, and wore light print dresses and spotlessly clean white aprons and caps; order and system reigned, and the money was rolling in. It was an animated scene, made the more agreeable by the pleasant faces and the civility which distinguished those who were attending to the customers.

“It will do,” said Dr. Perriera in a tone of approval. “Before the year is out, Timothy will have a score of such shops in poor localities. He is made of the right stuff; his future is assured. Let us return now, and I will bring your son to you.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. MANNERS sat alone in Dr. Perriera's living-room, awaiting the arrival of his son. The last twenty-four hours had been the most pregnant in his life; in a few minutes his fate would be decided; in a few minutes he would know whether the years that remained to him would be brightened by love, or made desolate by loneliness—loneliness in which reigned a terror and despair he had never yet experienced. Hitherto he had been a law unto himself; hitherto he had borne the fate he had courted with a stern implacable spirit, bearing with bitter resolve the burden he had inflicted upon himself. There had been no resignation in his soul to soften his

sufferings, and he had not sought the consolation which charity or religion would have shed upon him. His heart had been as a sealed box, into which no ray of light had entered; all was dark and desolate. He would soon learn whether this would continue to be his fate. Some savage comfort had come to him in the past from the belief that he was in the right, and Kingsley in the wrong, but this would be denied to him now. The thought had occasionally intruded itself that Kingsley would come to him as a suppliant, begging for mercy and forgiveness; but the positions were reversed; it was he, not his son, who was the suppliant; it was he, not his son, who pleaded for forgiveness.

Each moment seemed prolonged. "He refuses to come," thought the repentant man. "I am to my only child as one who is dead. It is a just punishment." It was in accordance with his character that he should recog-

nise the justice of the position in which he stood.

When he heard footsteps in Dr. Perriera's shop, he rose to his feet and looked towards the door as a criminal might, awaiting his sentence. The door opened, and Kingsley entered.

His face was radiant ; a tender light shone in his eyes.

“ Why, father ! ” cried Kingsley, and opened his arms.

“ Thank God ! ”

He did not speak the words aloud ; they were spoken by his grateful heart as he pressed his son to his breast. Then he gently released himself, and gazed with tearful eyes upon the son he had turned from his home.

Kingsley was much altered. His hair was grayer than that of his father ; his face was worn and thin ; but the tender whimsical spirit of old dwelt in his eyes.

At the present moment it was only the

sympathetic chords in his nature which found expression.

“I knew you would come, father,” said Kingsley, and at the tender utterance of the word Mr. Manners’ heart was stirred by a new-born joy; “I always said you would come to us one day. And Nansie, too; she never wavered in her belief that we should see you. ‘The time will be sure to arrive,’ she often said to me, ‘when we shall be reunited; and when your dear father comes to us, we have a home for him.’ Yes, father, our home is yours. A poor one, but you will not mind that. It needs but little for happiness, and we have been happy, very happy.”

“Oh, Kingsley,” said Mr. Manners, “can you, can your good wife forgive me?”

“Forgive you, father!” exclaimed Kingsley, in a tone of surprise. “For what? You have done nothing but what you thought was right. Indeed, the fault has been on our side, for not coming to you. It was our duty,

and we neglected it. Father, I do not think you know Nansie as well as I should wish."

"I do not," said the humbled man. "Oh, Kingsley, that I should ever have shut you from my heart!"

"I declare," said Kingsley, putting his hand fondly on his father's shoulder, "if any man but you said as much, I should feel inclined to quarrel with him. Shut me from your heart! I am sure you have never done that. I am sure you have thought of us with tenderness, as we have thought of you. Yes, father, in our prayers you have always been remembered. And we were content to wait your will, which was ever wise and strong. Not like mine—but that is my loss. A man cannot help being what he is, and I am afraid that I have been wanting in strength." He passed his hand across his forehead, half sadly, half humorously. "But I am truly thankful that I have had by my side a helpmate who has strewn my life

with flowers. Dear Nansie! Ever patient, ever hopeful, with her steadfast eyes fixed upon the light which you have brought to us now! Then, there is our dear daughter, your grandchild, father — ah, what a blessing she is to us! You will love Hester. Beautiful as her mother was—and is, father—with a nature as sweet and gentle, and as trustful, and confiding, and pure.”

A sudden weakness overcame him here, and with a little pitiful motion of his arms, he sank into a chair.

“Kingsley!” cried Mr. Manners, alarmed.
“Kingsley—my dear son!”

“It is nothing, father,” said Kingsley, looking up, and pressing his father’s hand to his lips. “The shock of happiness is so great! I scarcely expected it to-night. I was thinking of Nansie. She will be so grateful—so grateful!”

“Does she not know?”

“She knows nothing of this sweet joy.

Nor did I when Dr. Perriera called me from the room. I am glad he told me as we came along. You will remain with us a little while?"

"We will never part again, Kingsley, if you, and Nansie, and Hester will have me."

"If we will have you! Why, father, how can you ask that? Nansie will be overjoyed, and Hester will go wild with delight and happiness. How often has the dear child asked: 'When am I going to see grandfather?' Well, now her desire will be gratified. She will see you, and will love and honour you, as we have always done, and we always shall do. Hush! Is not that Nansie's voice I hear?"

It was, indeed, Nansie who was speaking softly to Dr. Perriera in the shop without. Anxious about Kingsley, she had slipped on her hat and mantle, and had followed him. In a few hurried words the good doctor had told her all, and she was now stand-

ing in trembling hope to learn the best or worst.

“Kingsley,” said Mr. Manners, “if it is your wife outside, go to her, and ask her if she will see me. Let her come in alone.”

“As you wish, father. I will remain with Dr. Perriera while you speak to her.”

With a fond look at his father he left the room, and a moment afterwards Nansie and Mr. Manners stood face to face. Tearfully and wistfully she stood before him. Better than Kingsley did she recognise what this meeting might mean to her and her beloved ones. He held out his hand, and with a sudden rush of joy she bent her head over it.

Had any barrier remained standing in the proud man's heart, this simple action would have effectually destroyed it. He could more easily have borne reproachful words, and was ready to acknowledge them his due, but this sweet and grateful recognition of a

too tardy justice almost broke him down. He turned his head humbly aside, and said :

“ Can you forgive me, Nansie — my daughter ? ”

“ Father ! ” she cried, and fell sobbing in his arms.

It was a night never to be forgotten. In his heart of hearts Mr. Manners breathed a prayer of thankfulness that the flower of repentance had blossomed for the living, and not for the dead. Often it blossoms too late, and then it is a fateful flower, and leaves a curse, and not a blessing, behind it.

But this night was not only to bear the sweet fruit of goodness and self-denial ; it was to bring forth a fitting punishment of a life of cunning and duplicity.

Linked close together, Mr. Manners and his children walked to Kingsley's humble rooms, and there the old man received his grandchild's kiss. Instinctively he was made

to feel that, through all this long and bitter separation, no word of complaining had ever reached Hester's ears. All the brighter in his eyes shone the characters of Kingsley and Nansie, and readily did he acknowledge that never was nobility more truly shown. The little room in which they sat was a garden of love.

Nor was the old book-man forgotten. He and Mr. Manners, in one firm hand-clasp, forged a link which even the grave would not sever.

Timothy Chance was not with them ; he had other business to see to. What that business was, and to what it led, will now be told.

CHAPTER XV.

THE clock struck nine when a knock was heard at the door. Hester rose and opened it, and Dr. Perriera appeared. He looked round upon the happy group and smiled; but when the smile faded they observed an unwonted gravity in his face.

“What has happened?” asked Nansie, solicitously. Her sympathetic nature was ever on the alert to detect signs of trouble in her friends.

“Hester,” said Dr. Perriera, “leave us for a moment or two. I wish to speak to your parents alone.”

The girl retired to the inner room, and shut herself in.

“It is best to keep it from her ears,” said Dr. Perriera; he addressed Mr. Manners. “You are as much concerned as any here in the news I have to impart. I was not present when you and a friend came to the neighbourhood this morning to see Mr. Parkinson, but if I am not mistaken, you are interested in the misfortune which has fallen upon him.”

“I am deeply interested in it,” replied Mr. Manners, “and have pledged myself to sift the unhappy matter to the bottom. But unfortunately the poor girl has disappeared.”

“The truth may be made clear this very night,” said Dr. Perriera. “Strange news has strangely reached me. May I ask if this is the portrait of the friend who accompanied you?”

He handed to Mr. Manners the portrait of Mark Inglefield which Mr. Parkinson had

shown to him and Mr. Hollingworth on the previous night, when he came to seek redress.

“Yes, it is he,” said Mr. Manners.

“I obtained it from Mr. Parkinson,” said Dr. Perriera, “and promised that I would return it.”

“But your reason?” asked Mr. Manners.

“If you will come with me,” replied Dr. Perriera, “all shall be explained. No, not you, or you”—Kingsley and Nansie had both risen, in token of their willingness to assist him. “Leave the matter in our hands. I am at present,” he added, glancing at Mr. Manners, “somewhat in the dark, and perhaps I have small right to inquire into your motives. What chiefly concerns me, as taking what I may call a vital interest in the poor people among whom I have passed my life, is that a worthy man has been foully wronged, and a weak-minded girl beguiled

by the arts of a scoundrel. To right this wrong I am willing to make some sacrifice, if only in the cause of justice."

While he spoke, Mr. Manners, without thinking, had laid the portrait of Mark Inglefield on the table, and Kingsley, looking down, recognised it. A sudden paleness came on his face, and Nansie, following the direction of his eyes, also looked at the portrait and recognised it. For a moment or two no one spoke, and then Kingsley whispered a few words to Nansie, and she left the room in silence.

"Before you go with Dr. Perriera," said Kingsley to his father, "there is something that must be said. It refers to this man, in whose company I now learn you came here this morning."

"Speak, Kingsley," said Mr. Manners, extending his hand to his son; but Kingsley did not attempt to take it. "Do you doubt me, Kingsley?"

“No, father,” said Kingsley, with a certain decision in his voice and manner which surprised his listeners, “I do not doubt you ; I never have, and I never shall. Most earnestly do I hope that we shall never be separated again.”

“We never shall, Kingsley,” said Mr. Manners, “if it rests with me. You have no reason to trust my word——”

“I have every reason,” interrupted Kingsley, impetuously. “You have never swerved from it ; you have been always just. It is not” — and now there was a heightened colour in his face as he pointed to the portrait — “because this man was my enemy that I regard him with horror, but because I have grounds for suspicion that he sought to defame the dearest, purest woman that ever drew the breath of heaven. For me, he may pass by unscathed, though I would not defile myself by touching his hand ; but for another, whom I love and honour as

an angel on earth, I would drag his foul lie to light, and throw it in his teeth! I have erred, but never in my life have I done conscious wrong. What there is best in me, father, I draw from you." Mr. Manners sighed and turned his head. "You never deceived man or woman, and you transmitted to me an inheritance of right-doing, which has been more precious to me than gold. Answer me candidly, father. Did not this man traduce my wife?"

"He did—and heaven forgive me, I believed him."

"And now?"

"And now," said Mr. Manners, stretching forth his hands, "there is no penance I would deem too great to repair the injustice I have committed. The man who traduced you and your honoured wife is no longer my friend. Without you, my son, and Nansie, and Hester, I should be alone in the world."

This appeal was sufficient for Kingsley,

whose manner instantly softened. He passed his arm affectionately round his father's shoulder.

"After all," he said, "why should we be troubled by the knowledge that there are men living who find pleasure in base actions? Let us pity even while we condemn them."

But there was no pity in Mr. Manners' heart towards Mark Inglefield. His suspicions were revived by what Dr. Perriera had said, and the true nature of the man seemed to be revealed to him.

"You will return to-night, father?" said Kingsley.

Mr. Manners looked at Dr. Perriera.

"I cannot tell," said the doctor. "It will depend upon what you resolve to do."

"Can I find a bed in the neighbourhood?" asked Mr. Manners.

"I can offer you one," replied Dr. Perriera.

"Early or late," said Mr. Manners to Kingsley, "I will return to-night."

“ We will wait up for you,” said Kingsley.

Then Mr. Manners called Nansie and Hester, and, kissing them with much affection, departed with Dr. Perriera.

As they walked to the shop, Mr. Manners, without reserve, imparted to Dr. Perriera the nature of the connection between him and Mark Inglefield. The confidence was a great relief to him. Hitherto he had taken pride in keeping his private affairs close shut in his heart, and now that the flood-gates were open, a strange feeling of satisfaction stole over him. Truly he was no longer alone.

Dr. Perriera did not interrupt him with questions, and when Mr. Manners ceased speaking he said : “ I will not assist you to prejudge the case. You shall hear from Timothy Chance’s own lips the story he related to me.”

“ It is he, then,” said Mr. Manners, “ who has stirred up this matter afresh ? ”

“ Timothy,” said the doctor, “ is one of us.

He passed many years of his life in these streets, and he is acquainted with nearly every person round about. He knew Mary Parkinson as a child, and, sharp business man as he is, he is keen in matters of justice."

"Does he know anything of my intimacy with Mr. Inglefield?"

"No; nor does he know that Kingsley is your son. It will be strange news to him, and he will rejoice in the good fortune of the dearest friends he has. I bade him await my return in my shop."

Mr. Manners was scarcely prepared to see in Timothy Chance a man who won his regard the moment he set eyes upon him. Timothy had grown into something more than a respectable man; his appearance was remarkable. He was tall and well proportioned, and there was a sincerity and straightforwardness in his manner which could not fail to favourably impress strangers with whom he came into contact for the first time. Being introduced,

he and Mr. Manners shook hands with cordiality. "Here is a man," thought Mr. Manners, "who, like myself, has carved his way upwards." That fact was in itself sufficient to ensure respect.

"Mr. Chance," said Dr. Perriera—he usually called him by the old name Timothy, but on this occasion he considered it would add weight to Timothy's character to address him by a more ceremonious title—"relate to Mr. Manners what you have told me of Mary Parkinson. It may lead to a result you little dream of."

"Will it lead to justice?" asked Timothy.

"It shall," said Mr. Manners.

These two practical men immediately understood each other.

"It saddens me," said Timothy, addressing himself chiefly to Mr. Manners, "to see those I have known from childhood on the wrong path. Generally these things come home to one, but they appeal to us more

closely when there is a personal connection. The lot of the poor is hard enough, without those who should know better making it harder. I do not speak as a class man, but as a man who is desirous to mend social grievances. Perhaps by-and-by I may be able to do something in a public way."

"Mr. Chance is ambitious," observed Dr. Perriera.

"Not for myself, nor from vanity, am I so. I have nothing to boast of in my parents, for I never saw their faces. I have lifted myself out of the evil they might have brought upon me. These things lie deep, sir, deeper than most people consider. But that is not to the point. This is what I have to say with respect to Mary Parkinson. I have a poultry farm in Finchley, and I attend to my business. I am up early and late. It happened last night that I had much to look after, and my affairs kept me up till the small hours of this morning.

Within a hundred yards of my farm is a public-house, the 'Three Tuns.' At four o'clock this morning I walked from my office into the fresh air, before retiring to rest. I do this often; it freshens me up. When I was within a few yards of the 'Three Tuns,' my attention was attracted to a cab which had just driven up to the door. It was an unusual hour for such a thing to occur. A man got out of the cab, and knocked at the door, and after some delay it was opened. Exchanging some words with the person who answered his summons, he returned to the cab, and assisted a woman to alight. I did not catch sight of her face, but I saw the man's; it was strange to me. The woman appeared to be in great agitation, and it seemed to me that she had been crying. Presently they entered the public-house, the door of which was closed upon them. I got into conversation with the driver of the cab, and learnt that he had had a long drive from

the east end of London, quite close to this spot. He was to drive the gentleman back to London, he said ; and soon the gentleman came out, entered the cab, and was driven away. I don't know why this simple adventure should have made an impression upon me, but it did. However, I had other things to think of, and I went to bed. I was up early, and in London here, to see to the new shop I have opened. I was due in Finchley again this afternoon—I am a busy man, you see, sir—and it happened that when I arrived there I saw another cab stop at the 'Three Tuns.' But though it was another cab, it was the same man who got out of it, and I saw his face very clearly. It was not the same woman, though, that jumped out, and I knew her well. It was a poor, foolish girl, almost a child in years, but a woman in sin, who goes by the name of Blooming Bess. Both the man and the girl went into the 'Three

'Tuns.' My curiosity was aroused; my suspicions also. I did not like the face of the man; it was cold, heartless, cunning. He had cast looks about him in which I seemed to discern evil; he came from a quarter, or at least his companions did, with which I was intimately acquainted. We don't live in the world without learning, and I have learnt something of the ways of scoundrels. If chance had put it into my power to unmask one—and I had a strange idea that it might be really so—I resolved not to throw it away. I hung about the place for some time, and at length bribed a servant to tell Blooming Bess secretly that a friend wished to speak to her in private. Out she came in a few minutes, and I had talk with her, and learnt that the woman who had been brought to the 'Three Tuns,' in the middle of the night, was no other than Mary Parkinson. Blooming Bess is a careless, reckless soul, the sort of girl who might

have grown into an honest, respectable woman if she had had fair chances. She hadn't, and that is why she is what she is. I don't say it as a boast that I have helped her out of hunger sometimes, and I know she is grateful to me. This afternoon I promised her something which I shall fulfil; she shall have the chance that has never yet been put in her way of becoming a decent member of society. And upon the strength of that promise she told me all I wished to know. It seems that the man, whose name she had obtained, had come in the dead of night to the street in which Mr. Parkinson lived. He did not know the house, and he bribed Blooming Bess to point it out to him. When he thought he had got rid of her, he threw a letter up to Mary Parkinson, whom he had succeeded in awaking, and she came down to him. They went away together, and Blooming Bess saw them drive off in a cab. She had kept watch upon his

movements. This morning the scoundrel came to the neighbourhood for the purpose of clearing himself from some kind of suspicion which had attached itself to him in relation to Mary Parkinson. He came with a friend."

"With me," said Mr. Manners.

"I guessed as much. The scoundrel professed absolute ignorance of the whereabouts of Mary Parkinson, and had it not been for what happened to me last night, might even now have been regarded as an innocent man. I will not lengthen the story. Blooming Bess expressed her opinion of the man in terms which he would not have regarded as flattering. 'He's promised me I don't know what,' she said, 'to keep his secret; but I know the sort of man he is. When he's got all out of me he can, he'll throw me away like an old glove—as he'll throw away Mary. The fool believes in him even now!' Then she told me that he had tried to disguise himself in

the night by putting on another suit of clothes—I had observed that myself—and that if it hadn't been for her, his villainy would have been exposed this morning when he came here with you. These are the main lines of the story, and I determined to bring the scoundrel to book. I gathered from Blooming Bess that the three of them were to remain at the 'Three Tuns' to-night, and were all to go away together to some place or other; but where she did not know. He refused to tell her when she asked him. However, my intention was to take Mr. Parkinson to the 'Three Tuns' to-night, and see what could be done. But I have not spoken to him yet of my plan. Dr. Perriera, to whom I have told the whole of the story, has persuaded me to be guided by him in the affair; he has a wise head and a kind heart, and I am satisfied that he will do what is right. The first thing he did was to go to Mr. Parkinson and obtain a portrait of

the scoundrel who has brought Mary to shame. This I recognised as the man who brought Mary Parkinson and Blooming Bess to the 'Three Tuns.' Then he desired me to wait here until he returned. He *has* returned, with you, sir. That is all I have to say for the present."

"I need no further assurance," said Mr. Mannors; "but you may as well mention the name which that girl Bess gave you."

"Mr. Mark Inglefield," said Timothy Chance.

"It is enough. You have rendered me a great service, for which I cannot be sufficiently grateful. I will go to this man myself to-night, and he shall learn from my lips that his knavery and villainy have been brought to light. I hold a power over him which I can serviceably use."

"Your plan is a good one, said Dr. Perriera. "It would never do to take Mr. Parkinson to his daughter. There would be

mischievous done. He has been heard to say, a dozen times to-day, 'If I meet the villain who has ruined my daughter, and if he will not make an honest woman of her, I will hang for him.' You will not go alone?"

Mr. Manners looked at Timothy Chance inquiringly.

"Yes, sir," said Timothy, "if you will allow me, I will accompany you."

"I thank you," said Mr. Manners, and again the two men shook hands.

Then Mr. Manners desired Dr. Perriera to go to Kingsley, and tell him that he might not return till morning, and that it would be best not to wait up for him. After which, he and Timothy set out on their errand.

"I will drive you," said Timothy; "I have a fast-trotting mare that will skim over the ground."

The fast-trotting mare being harnessed, they started off at the rate of ten miles an hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was closing time at the "Three Tuns," and some tipplers were being bundled out, much against their will, when Timothy Chance, entering with Mr. Manners, called the landlord aside, and had a hurried conference with him. The result was satisfactory.

"They are having supper in a private room," said Timothy to Mr. Manners, "and the landlord will take us up, unannounced."

They ascended the stairs, and the landlord, without knocking, throwing open the door, Timothy and Mr. Manners entered the room.

Mark Inglefield was sitting at the supper table; by his side sat Mary Parkinson; opposite to them sat Blooming Bess. Mark

Inglefield, looking up, with angry words on his lips at the intrusion, was about to utter them, when, seeing who his visitors were, he fell back as if suddenly paralysed. His face was of a deadly pallor, his limbs trembled, he was speechless. Mr. Manners gave him time to recover himself, but the detected villain did not speak. He felt that retribution had overtaken him.

"I wish to say a word to you," said Mr. Manners, sternly. "Do you prefer it should be said here or in private?"

Mark Inglefield, shaking like a man in an ague, rose to his feet and staggered to the door.

"In private?" asked Mr. Manners.

"In private," replied Mark Inglefield, his voice scarcely rising above a whisper.

"Remain here," said Mr. Manners to Timothy, "and explain to Miss Parkinson why we have come."

Then he followed Mark Inglefield from the room. The landlord was on the stairs, and

at Mr. Manners' request he conducted the two to another room, saying :

“You will not be disturbed.”

Summoning all his courage, Mark Inglefield said :

“This is an unexpected honour, sir. Your errand is probably the same as mine.”

“What may your errand be ?” asked Mr. Manners.

“I said this morning,” replied Mark Inglefield, striving to believe that the game was not yet lost, and that he could still continue to deceive the man upon whom he had imposed for so many years, “that I would find Mary Parkinson, and endeavour to extract the truth from her. With the aid of a detective I succeeded in tracking her here.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Manners, inwardly resolving to ascertain to what further lengths in the art of duplicity Mark Inglefield would go ; “was she surprised to see you ?”

“Very,” said Mark Inglefield, beginning to gain confidence. “Very much surprised.”

“She did not know you?”

“How could she, sir? It was a bold plan of mine, but I have hopes that it will be attended with the happiest results. To restore an erring child to her father’s arms is a task of which I am sure you will approve.”

“I do.”

“Perhaps,” continued Mark Inglefield (thinking to himself, “what a fool I was to exhibit any sign of fear!”), “perhaps to bring her back to the path of virtue and make an honest woman of her—this is what I hope to achieve. Then I could come to you, and say: ‘I have done this good action in return for the slander which an enemy dared to breathe against me.’”

“It would be a good action. To bring a weak, erring child back to the path of virtue, and make an honest woman of her. Is that really your wish?”

“What other wish can I have, sir, with respect to Mr. Parkinson? Would it not entirely clear me from suspicion?”

Mr. Manners ignored the question. “She did not know you, you say. How did you introduce yourself to her? In your own name?”

“Of course. It would have been wrong to use another.”

“Did the detective you employed accompany you?”

“He did; else I should hardly have found this out-of-the-way hole—in which, sir, I am surprised to see you. But I need not express surprise. Your decision of character and kindness of heart are well known to me.”

“My decision of character—yes; my kindness of heart—those are meaningless words in your experience of me. But the past can be atoned for.”

“You have nothing to reproach yourself with, sir.”

“My conscience answers. But it is not to speak of myself that I have come to-night. Is the detective who conducted you here now in the house? I should like to speak to him.”

“How unfortunate! It is but a few minutes since he left us. Had I known——”

“But you did not know.”

“No, indeed, sir.”

“Did you disclose to Miss Parkinson the nature of your errand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What was her answer?”

“She was grateful, truly grateful.”

“Was it your intention to take her back to her home to-night?”

“Scarcely to-night. Early in the morning, after she was calmer, and prepared to meet her father.”

“She has a companion with her?”

It was this question which caused Mark Inglefield to suddenly recollect that Mr. Mannors had seen Blooming Bess earlier in

the day. Up to this point he had not given her a thought.

“Ah, yes, sir, a companion, who gave us certain information when we paid our visit to Mr. Parkinson. It was a happy thought of mine to take the poor girl with us; it would inspire Miss Parkinson with confidence in me. Besides, sir, it would not have been proper for me to visit Miss Parkinson alone.”

“Shall I call her down to test the truth of your statements?”

“Surely, sir, you do not doubt me!”

“I ask again, shall I call her down to test the truth of your statements?”

“Shall I go up and bring her down to you?”

“In order,” said Mr. Manners, “that you may have time to concoct some story which you can prevail upon her to adopt, so that I may be the further deceived?”

“Sir, you wrong me,” stammered Mark Inglefield.

“Mr. Inglefield,” said Mr. Manners, “let us throw aside the mask of treachery and deceit. The questions I addressed to you were put for a purpose. Is it sufficiently explicit to you if I tell you that you have betrayed yourself?”

“I do not understand you.”

“That is not true. You understand me well enough, though yet you do not know all I have resolved upon. It is I, not you, who will take Miss Parkinson to her father to-night. It is for you, not for me, to make an honest woman of her.”

Then, indeed, did Mark Inglefield know that the game was up.

“If you are determined not to believe what I say, sir——”

“Not one word. All your statements are false—in the present, as they have been in the past. It was you who stole Miss Parkinson from her home last night, and the poor girl who is now with her was bought over

by you. Be thankful that you are spared a visit from Mr. Parkinson. But for me, you would be face to face with him, and would have had to answer for your crime. Mr. Inglefield, evil can be atoned for. For the evil I have done in the past it shall be my endeavour to atone. It will be to your interest to come to the same resolve."

"Can nothing I can say convince you that you are doing me an injustice?"

"Nothing. So much has been revealed and made clear to me that only one course remains open to you, so far as I am concerned."

"Perhaps," said Mark Inglefield, in a tone which he vainly strove to make defiant, "you will explain yourself?"

"I will do so. You will marry the girl you have brought to shame."

"I, sir, I! It is a monstrous idea!"

"Knowing you as I know you now, there

is indeed something revolting in it—and it may be that she will not give you the opportunity of making atonement.” Mark Inglefield smiled scornfully. “There is a road,” pursued Mr. Manners, “out of evil, and for a little while this road will be open to you. Turn your back upon it, and go forth into the world, a beggar! Enter it—with a purified heart, if you can—and I will make you recompense.”

“You will fulfil the expectations you have always held out to me?”

“No. My promise was given to a man of honour, as I believed. I will not bring my tongue to utter what you have proved yourself to be. But I will give you a competence, which my lawyers shall arrange with you. For myself, after this night I will never see you again, nor shall you ever again darken my door. There is something more, and it may weigh with you. For years past you have transacted certain business matters for

me. I have not too closely looked into them. Refuse the offer I have made to you, and they shall be searched into and examined with but one end in view—punishment. Accept it, and all that has passed between us in connection with these matters shall be buried for ever. You will know how best to decide. I give you”—he took out his watch—“five minutes to decide. Your fate and future are in your own hands.”

Then there was silence. With his back turned to Mr. Manners, Mark Inglefield debated with himself. He knew that the matters to which Mr. Manners referred would not bear investigation, and that he was in danger of the criminal dock ; he knew that Mr. Manners would show him no mercy. He shrugged his shoulders savagely, and said :

“What do you call a competence ?”

“It shall be decided between you and my lawyers at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon,

by which time they will have received my instructions. You have barely half a minute to arrive at a decision. I am inexorable."

"I accept your offer," said Mark Inglefield.

"You will find Miss Parkinson in her father's home. There must be no delay. Farewell."

At nine o'clock the following morning Mr. Manners sat at breakfast with Kingsley, Nansie, and Hester. There were no traces of fatigue on Mr. Manners' face; on the contrary, it looked fresh and young. A new and better life was before him. Mr. Loveday, the good old book-man, kept purposely away; he would not intrude upon a meeting which he deemed had something sacred in it. And indeed it had. Hearts that should never have been separated were united, and love shone within the little room.

It was a humble meal, but the sweetest that Mr. Manners had tasted for many, many

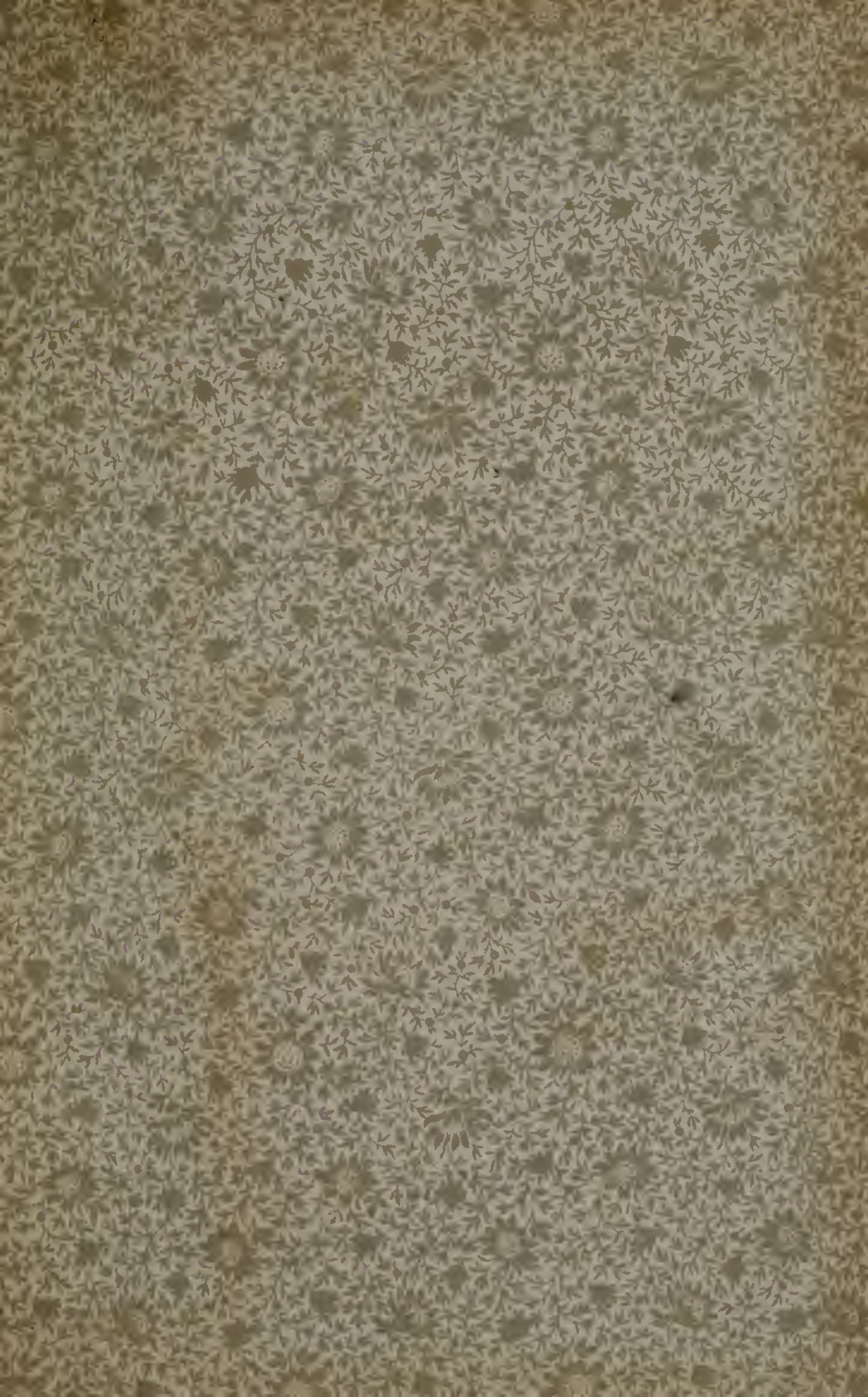
years. Nansie's face was bright, and now and then her lips were wreathed in happy smiles, and now and then her eyes were filled with tears. And so, we leave them. Flowers are blossoming; there is good in the future to be done.

It may be, also, in the future, that Hester Manners and Timothy Chance may come together for weal or woe. Words have yet to be spoken, but in their hearts love has already found its nest. May their lives be as sweet and pure as the lives of Kingsley and Nansie! There will be manna for the hungry, and light will be shed upon the dark spaces of the east.

THE END.







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